THE CRIME AT VANDERLYNDEN'S

At the Sign of
The Cupid and Lion

By R. H. Mottram

THE SPANISH FARM
was awarded the Hawthornden
Prize for 1924

SIXTY-FOUR NINETY-FOUR

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By

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"Oh, my, I don't want to die,
I want to go home!"

Song of Kitchener's Army

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HIGH up in the pale Flemish sky aeroplanes were wheeling and darting like bright-coloured insects, catching from one moment to another the glint of sun on metallic body or translucent wing. To any pilot or observer who had opportunity or gift for mere speculation, the sight that lay spread out below might have appeared wonderful. From far away on the seaboard with its coming and going of ships, there led rail, road, and wire, and by these three came material, human material, and human thought, up to that point just behind the battle-line where in dumps, camps (dumps of men) and Head-quarters (dumps of brain) they eddied a little, before streaming forward again, more slowly and covertly, by night, or below ground, up

to the battle itself. There they were lost in that gap in life—that barren lane where the Irresistible Force dashing against the Immovable Post ground such a fine powder, that of material, very little, of men, very few, and of thought, nothing came splashing back.

But pilots and observers were too busy, adding to the Black Carnival, or saving their own skins from those puffs of Death that kept following them up and down the sky, to take any such a remote view; and even had they been interested in it, they could not have lifted the roof off the Mairie of the village—almost town—of Haagedoorne, and have seen, sitting in the Mayor's parlour, a man of middle size and middle class, a phenomenon in that place, that had been shocked in its village dignity so many times in those few months. For first it had been turned from one of those haunts of Peace, of small slow-moving officialdom, into the "Q." office of Divisional Head-quarters. It had become inhabited by two or three English Staff Officers, their maps and papers, their orderlies and clerks, policemen and servants; and now, last of all, there was added to them this quiet, absorbed young man—whose face and hair, figure and clothes had all

those half-tones of moderate appropriateness of men who work indoors and do not expect too much. A young man who had neither red tabs nor long boots about him—and who seemed to have so much to do.

The old walls stared. The Mairie of Haagedorne, half wine-shop, half beadle's office, had seen soldiers in its four hundred years, had been built for Spanish ones, and had seen them replaced by French and Dutch, English and Hessians, in bright uniforms and with a certain soldierly idleness and noise. This fellow had none of it. Sat there with his nose well down, applying himself to maps and papers, occasionally speaking deferentially to Colonel Birchin, who, a proper soldier, his left breast bright with medals, his face blank and slightly bored with breeding, would nod or shake his head. This was all part of the fact that this War was not as other wars. It was too wide and deep, as if the foundations of life had come adrift on some subterranean sea, and the whole fabric were swaying; it had none of the decent intervals, and proper limits, allowing men to shut up for the winter and to carry on their trade all the time.

The dun-coloured person attached to Divi-

sional Staff, whose name was Stephen Doughty Dormer, indulged in none of these reflections. He just got on with it. He was deep in his job when an exclamation from his temporary Chief made him look up. The Colonel was sitting back in his chair (iron-bottomed, officers, for the use of), his beautiful legs in their faultless casings stretched out beneath his army table. He was holding at arm's-length a blue printed form, filled up in pen and ink.

Dormer knew it well. It was the official form on which Belgian or French civilians were instructed to make their claim for damages caused by the troops billeted on them.

The Colonel's mouth hung open, his eyeglass had dropped down.

"You speak this—er—language?"

"Yessah!" (with a prayer it might not be Portuguese). "What language, sir?"

"This is—er—French."

Yes, he could speak French, and hastened to look. Dormer was a clerk in a bank. Like so many of that species, he had had a grandmother with views as to the improvement of his position in the world, and she had insisted that he should learn the French language. Why she desired

this was never discovered, unless it was that she considered it a genteel accomplishment, for she dated from the days when society was composed of two sorts of people, gentle and simple. She belonged to the former category and was in no danger of allowing any of her descendants to lapse. As she paid for the extra tuition involved, her arguments were irrefutable, and the boy intended for no more romantic a career than is afforded by a branch office in a market town, had, in 1900, a fair knowledge of the tongue of Voltaire and Hugo.

He hardly reflected upon the matter again until, in the midst of a European War, he found that that War was being conducted in a country where French was the chief language, and that familiar-sounding words and phrases assailed his ears on every side. This was of considerable service to him, enabled him to add to his own and his brother officers' comfort; but he never boasted of it, having a profound uncertainty, after years of clerkdom, about anything so foreign and out of office hours. The legend of his peculiar ability persisted, however; and when after more than a year of incredible fatigues and nastiness, his neat methods and perfect amenity to orders

were rewarded by the unofficial job of helping in the A. and Q. office of a division, he found his legend there before him. It was therefore with a sigh, and a mental ejaculation equivalent to "Spare me these useless laurels," that he got up and went over to his Chief's table, to be confronted by the sentence:

"*Esquinté une vierge chez moi!*"

"What's *Esquinté?* It's not in Cassell's Dictionary!"

"I should say—knocked asquint, sir! Spoiled, ruined; they often say it, if the troops go into the crops."

"Well, how does it read, then? Knock asquint; no, that won't do; ruined, you say. Ruined a Virgin in my house. This sounds like a nice business, with the French in their present mood!"

Dormer simply could not believe it and asked:

"May I see the claim?"

"Certainly. Come here. Stop me wherever I go wrong."

He knew more French than Dormer gave him credit for. He read the blue form, printed question and pen-and-ink reply to the end. It went like this:

Q. When was the damage committed?

A. Last Thursday.

Q. What troops were responsible? Give the number and name of the English detachment.

A. A soldier of the 469 Trench Mortar Battery (T.M.B.).

Q. Were you present and did you see the damage done?

A. No, but my daughter knows all about it.

Q. In what conditions was the damage done?

A. He broke the window (*vitrage*). She called out to him, but he replied with oaths.

Q. Can you prove responsibility (*a*) by witness?

A. My daughter.

Q. (*b*) By *procès-verbal.*

A. They insulted the Mayor when he came to do it!

Q. (*c*) By admission of the culprits.

A. Not necessary. It is visible.

Q. Did you complain to the officer commanding troops?

A. He would not listen.

And so on.

Deposed and sealed at the Mairie of Hondebecq, Nord, as the claim for compensation of Mr.

Vanderlynden, cultivator, 64 years old, by us Swingadow, Achille, Mayor.

"What do you say to that?" asked the Chief.

Dormer had a good deal to say, but kept it down. "I can't believe it, sir. I know the billet. I remember Miss Vanderlynden. She's as strong as a man and much more determined than most. It's a mistake of some sort!"

"Pretty circumstantial mistake, isn't it? Look at this covering letter received with it."

He held out a memorandum headed: "Grand Quartier General," in French, to the effect that one desired it might be given appropriate attention. And another from a department of English General Head-quarters with "Passed to you, please."

"The French have had their knife into us for some time. This'll be a nice case for them to take up. We must make an arrest at once. Sergeant!"

That Sergeant was a famous London Architect. He came to the door of the ante-room in which he worked.

"In what Corps Area is Hondebecq?"

The Sergeant spotted it in a moment, on the big map pinned up on the wall.

"Very well, wire them to take this up, and make an arrest."

"There is just one point I should like to put, sir!"

As Dormer said it, he felt it to be "cheek." His Chief turned upon him the eyeglass of a regular officer who found it rather difficult to imagine how a junior temporary officer could put a point. But Dormer had seen two Courts-Martial, and the thought of some poor brute hauled out of a trench, and marched about for no better purpose than that, kept him firm.

"If an arrest is made, you will have to go on with the proceedings."

"Naturally."

"Then you will need a statement from the victim. If we had that first, we should know the truth!"

"Well, you'd better go and get it, as you know the people. You can see Corps and insist on an arrest. But, most important of all, try what a little money can do. He says a thousand francs. Well, you must see what he will come down to."

Outside Divisional Head-quarters, Dormer turned to the right, to go to his billet, but a mil-

itary policeman, stepping out from the shelter of the buildings, saluted.

"They're shelling that way, sir!"

It gave Dormer a queer familiar feeling in the pit of the stomach. Shelling, the daily routine of that War. But being a very punctilious temporary officer, and taking his almost non-existent position in Divisional Staff very seriously, he pulled himself together.

"Oh, well, they'd have hit me long ago, if they could!" He passed on, followed by a smile. He said those things because he felt them to be good for the morale of the troops. Sure enough, he had not gone many yards before the air was rent by a familiar tearing sound, followed by the usual bump and roar. It was well in front of him, and to the left, and he went on reassured. A few yards farther on, close to the side street where he was billeted over a pork-butcher's shop, he noticed people coming out of their houses and shops to stare, while one elderly woman, rounder than any artist would dare to portray, asked him:

"O Monsieur, is the bombard finished?" in the Anglo-Flemish which years of billeting were beginning to teach the inhabitants of the town.

But the centre of excitement was farther on, where the little street of houses petered out between small, highly cultivated fields. Here the first shell had fallen right upon one of those limbers that were to be found being driven up some obscure street at any hour of the day or night. Two dazed drivers had succeeded in cutting loose and quieting the mules. A horse lay dead in the gutter. Against the bank leaned the Corporal, his face out of sight, as if in the midst of a hearty laugh. It needed only a glance, however, to see that there was no head upon the shoulders. It was just one of those daily disagreeable scenes which to Dormer had been so utterly strange all his life, and so familiar for the last year. Dormer made no fuss, but took charge. He knew well enough that the drivers would stand and look at each other. He sent one of them for a burial party from the nearest Field Ambulance, saw that the other tied up the mules and made a bundle of the dead man's effects—paybook, knife, money, letters—the pitiful little handkerchief-ful of all that remains for a soldier's loved ones—while he himself pushed his way into the orderly room of the nearest formation, that showed any

signs of telephone wires. He had not many yards to go, for the camps lay along side of that Flemish lane, as close as houses in a street.

He was soon inside an Armstrong hut, with the field telephone at his disposal, and while waiting to be given the orderly room of the Brigade Transport to which the casualty belonged, he happened to close his eyes. The effect was so striking that he immediately opened them again. There, on the underside of his eyelids, was the headless body he had just left. Curiously enough, it did not lie against the bank, as he had seen it, but it seemed to swim towards him, arms above his head, gesticulating. Once his eyes were open again, of course it disappeared.

About him was nothing more wonderful than the interior of an Armstrong hut Orderly Room, an army table, an army chair. Some one's bed and bath shoved in a corner. Outside, trampled mud, mule-lines, cinder tracks, Holland elms, flat, stodgy Flanders all desecrated with War. He got the number he wanted, told the Brigade to fetch their broken limber, gave his rank and job, and put up the telephone. The impression he had had was so strong, however, that walking back along the cinder path, he closed his eyes

again. Yes, it was still there, quite plain, the details of the khaki uniform all correct and clear cut, spurred boots and bandolier, but no head, and the arms raised aloft, exhorting or threatening.

If he went on like this he would have to see a Medical Officer, and they would send him down to the Base, and he would find his job filled up, and have to go elsewhere and start all over fresh, trying to do something that was not desperately boring or wholly useless. He had been doing too much, going up at night for "stunts," and working in Q. office all day. He would have to slack off a bit.

By the time he got back to Divisional H.Q. the car stood ready. The feelings of one who, having been hauled out of the infantry, had then to return to the Forward Areas, were curiously mixed. Of course no one wanted to be shelled or bombed, to live where the comforts of life were unpurchasable, and the ordinary means of locomotion out of use. And yet—and yet—there was a curious feeling of going home. That great rowdy wood and canvas and corrugated iron town, miles deep and nearly a hundred miles long, was where one belonged. That atmosphere of obvious jokes and equally obvious death, disinfect-

ant, tobacco, mules, and wood smoke had become one's life, one's right and natural environment.

His companion on this joyless ride was Major Stevenage, the A.P.M. of the Division, an ex-cavalry officer of the regular army, in appearance and mentality a darker and grimmer edition of Colonel Birchin.

Dormer showed him the Vanderlynden dossier as they bowled along. He surveyed it with the weariness of a professional to whom an amateur exhibits a "masterpiece."

"Colonel Birchin thinks it's rape, does he?"

"Yes!"

"He's wrong, of course. Q. office always are! What do you think it is yourself?"

"A nasty snag. What happened doesn't matter You and I could settle it for forty francs. But the French have got hold of it. It's become official."

"What do you suggest?" Major Stevenage put in his monocle.

"We must go and see the Maire, and get it withdrawn. Let's see. Hondebecque? It's the Communal Secretary Blanquart we must see. Shrewd fellow and all on our side. These schoolmasters hate the peasants."

Dormer knew the area well. Hondebecque was the typical village of French Flanders. That is to say, it was a cluster of cottages in which *rentiers*—peasants who had scraped a few savings out of the surrounding fields—lived on about forty pounds a year English; in its centre, a paved *grand' place* held a few modest shops, a huge high-shouldered church, carefully refaced with red brick, and a big, rambling "Estaminet de la Mairie," next to the village school.

It was here that they found Blanquart, Communal Secretary, schoolmaster, land surveyor, poor man's lawyer, Heaven only knows what other functions he used to combine. He was the only man in the Commune handy with pen and paper, and this fact must have substantially added to his income. But, like all his kind, he could not forget that he came from Dunkirk or Lille; he had moments when his loneliness got the better of his pride and he would complain bitterly of the "sacred peasants."

They found him seated in his little front parlour—he only functioned in the official room at the Estaminet on State occasions—busy with those innumerable forms by which the food of France was rationed, her Army conscripted, her

prices kept in check and her civil administration facilitated. In the corner between the window and the clock sat an old peasant who said only, "*Bonjour.*"

Blanquart greeted them effusively, as who should say: "We others, we are men of the world." He made polite inquiries about the officer's health and the weather and the War, leading up to the introduction: "Allow me to present you to Mister our Mayor! And now what can I do for you?"

Major Stevenage, a little lost in the mixed stream of good French and bad English, left it to Dormer.

"It is with reference to the claim of Vanderlynden! Can one arrange it?"

Blanquart had only time to put in: "Everything arranges itself," before the Mayor cut him short.

"You have some nice ideas, you others. Arrange it, I believe you. You will arrange it with our Deputy."

Blanquart put in: "Mister the Mayor was insulted by the troops. We wrote to our Deputy!"

Major Stevenage fidgeted. He had found it

most difficult to go through this sort of thing, day after day, for years. He had been trained to deal with Asiatics. He turned on Blanquart:

"Why didn't you write to me first?" but the Mayor cut in again. His general outlook on life was about that of an English agricultural labourer plus the dignity of Beadledom. This latter had been injured, and the man, who seldom spoke a dozen sentences a day, now was voluble. He understood more English than one gave him credit for.

"Why write to you, officer, you are all of the same colour!" (By this time not a German attack could have stopped him.) "My Garde Champêtre comes to tell me that there is a crime of violence at Vanderlynden's. They demand that I go to make *procès-verbal*. I put on my tricolour sash. I take my official notebook. I arrive. I demand the officer. *Il s'est foutu de moi!* (Untranslatable.) He says he has orders to march to the trenches. His troops hold me in derision. They sing laughable songs of me in my official capacity——"

"It is very well, Monsieur the Maire," Dormer broke in. "We go to make an arrestation. Can you indicate the culpable?"

"But I believe you, I can indicate him," cried the old man.

Dormer waited breathlessly for some fatal name or number which would drag a poor wretch through the slow exasperation of Court-Martial proceedings.

"It was a small brown man!"

"That does not lead us very far!" said Dormer icily.

"Wait!" The old man raised his voice. "Achille!" The door opened, and Achille Quaghebeur, the Garde Champêtre, in attendance on the Maire, stepped in and closed it behind him. He had, in his dark green and sulphur-colored uniform, with his assumption of importance, the air of a comic soldier out of "Madame Angot." "Produce the corroborative article!"

Achille found in his tail pocket surely the oldest and most faded of leather pocket-books. From this in turn he produced a piece of A.S.C. sacking, on which the word OATS was plainly printed in black.

"Voila!" said the Maire.

"Totally useless!" growled the Major, turning red.

This made the Maire furious; he grasped the intonation and expression if not the words.

"You others, you are enough to send one to sleep standing up. One produces the *corroborative* pieces and you treat them as useless." And there followed a tirade during which Dormer drew the Major outside, with profuse *Bonjours!* He thought that Blanquart was trying to sign to him that he wanted to say something to him privately. But the Major was upset, his dignity was hurt. A soldier by profession, he had reduced the settlement of claims to a fine art. He was said to have settled three thousand between the time he was made A.P.M. to the division on the Aisne to the day of his death at Bailleul. He told the chauffeur to drive to Vanderlynden's. The man seemed to know the way, and had probably been to the place many times. As the car jolted and ground over the cobbles into the yard, Dormer said:

"I shall ask for the daughter, Madeleine."

"Just so!"

"I don't believe——"

"Nor do I," said the Major stoutly.

Neither of them could pronounce the word "rape."

They got out, knocked at the door and knocked again. The place seemed not so much empty and deserted as enveloped in one of those encompassing noises that only sort themselves out on investigation. Too deep for a separator, too near for an aeroplane, Dormer diagnosed it: "They've got the Government thrasher in the back pasture, next the rye!" (He had a good memory and could tell pretty well how most of the people distributed crops and work.)

They recrossed the bridge of the moat and skirting the latter entered the back pasture. There against the gate that gave on to the arable "plain," as it was called in those parts, was the Government thrasher, the women labourers, and right on the top of the stack, old Vanderlynden.

Dormer shouted! Vanderlynden paid not the slightest heed. Perhaps he was deaf, no doubt the thrasher buzzed loud enough; but above all he was one of those old peasants whose only reply to this unheard-of War in which all had been plunged was to work harder and more continuously, and to show less and less consciousness of what went on round about them. There he stood, black against that shy and tender blue of

Flemish sky, the motions of his body mechanical, his face between collarless shirt and high-crowned, peaked cap, expressionless. Finally, Dormer took one of the short stout girls that were employed in raking the straw away from the travelling band, and shook her roughly by the arm.

She was, of course, a refugee Belgian. No one else would work like that, not even a Chinese woman. Like a clockwork figure, she began to speak in "English":

"No bon offizer billet all full you go Mairie!" without stopping for one moment her raking.

Dormer held her forearm rigid, and stopped her.

"Sdagte patron heer t'kom!"

That reached her consciousness. Throwing down her implement, she put both hands to her mouth and began shouting "Hoi!" at old Vanderlynden, and might have gone on shouting indefinitely if Dormer had not gone round to the French Army mechanic who drove the machine and given him an English canteen cigarette. That would have stopped an offensive. It soon stopped the thrasher and Vanderlynden looked down at his visitors.

"Good day, Patron!" called Dormer; "can we see Mademoiselle?"

The old man got down with unexpected agility. "Good day, my officer, what is it that there is?"

Dormer held out the blue claim form. At the sight of it, there came into Vanderlynden's face the look that a mule gives its feed, when, expecting and even enjoying bits of wood, leather, and nails, it comes across a piece of tin: not so much protest as long and malevolent calculation of the unknown. As a matter of fact he could not read more of it than his signature. He muttered once or twice, "*myn reclamorsche*," but got no further.

"Can we see Mademoiselle?" repeated Dormer.

The old man stared at him with the incredulity of a villager who finds a stranger ignorant of village news: "But, my officer, my young lady is gone!"

At that moment the French mechanic, who had lighted his cigarette and now only wanted to be done with the job, put his lever over, and set the thrasher buzzing again. As if spell-bound, old Vanderlynden gave one leap and regained his place on the stack. The Belgians fell to at their several jobs. The corn flew, the wheels whizzed,

the grain rattled in the hopper, the straw swished in long swathes beneath the rakes. Dormer and the Major were left standing, idle and forgotten, with their War, while the real business of the farm went steadily forward, only a little hastened because the thrasher had to be at Watten next day.

They walked back to the car, in a black frame of mind. Neither spoke, from war habit of not mentioning the omnipresent perversity of things. But Madeleine Vanderlynden's departure from the farm, coming after the wording of the claim, was ominous indeed.

Travelling by motor has many disadvantages, but against all these it has one crowning advantage: to those who are weary and overspent, it provides more immediately and completely than any other physical sensation the feeling of escape. What magic lies behind that word! To get into the car and go, no matter whither, and to leave at any rate one incomprehensible muddle behind him: that was the illusion while the chauffeur was starting.

No farther off than the gate of the pasture, swaying at slowest speed over the unevenness of the entry, the car stopped. A motor cyclist

slithered up beside it, saluted the A.P.M. and produced one of those scores of messages that fluttered about just beyond the end of the field telephone. Dormer might have passed unknown, but the A.P.M. was unmistakable. Having handed over the flimsy envelope, the pocket Hermes threw his leg over the saddle of the gibbering machine that carried him, and was away up the lane and out on to the *pavé* road, out of sight before the A.P.M. could get out the words "No answer."

The A.P.M. sat frowning at the pink Army message form. The chauffeur sat frowning, one hand on the wheel, his foot keeping the engine going by light continual touches on the accelerator, his face screwed round to catch the order to proceed. The Sergeant of police sat perfectly still and impassive, looking before him, the sunlight glinting on the tiny fair hairs of his clipped moustache. The cyclist had gone, the chauffeur wanted to go, and, after a moment, quietly slipped into first gear and let the car gently gather way. The policeman did not have to want. He had simply to sit still and his morning would pass as his other mornings did, in passively guarding law and order in the organiza-

tion of the British Armies in France and Flanders. It was not until the car was already moving at more than walking pace that the A.P.M. spoke, and Dormer got the queerest sensation from the sequence of such small events. For the first time it seemed to him that the A.P.M. was not in possession of the initiative. It was these private soldiers, waiting, coming and going, that forced him to give an order. The impression lasted only a moment, but it was disturbing. Decidedly, Dormer felt, he was not well, having such notions. Then he had no more time to think, for the A.P.M. was holding out the pink wire for him to read. He read:

"Corps requires signed statement of withdrawn claim." The illusion of escape was gone. The botheration was not behind, it was ahead of them.

"No use saying she isn't there. We shall have to concoct something." He was obviously waiting for Dormer to suggest.

"I think, sir, we might go back to Blanquart, and find out the girl's whereabouts. The Maire will be gone by now!"

"Thank goodness. To Hondebecq Mairie." The car flew from second to top speed.

Back at the Grand' Place of the village, the car

stopped, the chauffeur folded his hands, at the order to wait, the A.P.M. and Dormer entered the Estaminet. It was empty, as Dormer had foreseen. The Maire and his Secretary were not people who had time to waste, and were both gone about their jobs—the Maire to his farm, the clerk to his school, the classes of which were plainly audible through the wall, grinding out some lesson by heart, in unison, like some gigantic gramophone with a perpetual spring. It was the hour at which all France prepares for its substantial meal.

Outside the Grand' Place was empty, save for the sunshine, not here an enemy, as farther south, but the kindly friend that visits the coasts of the North Sea all too rarely, wasting its pale and tepid gold on the worn stones, on the green-shuttered, biscuit-coloured façades of subtantial two-storied houses, with steep roofs and tall chimneys, behind which protruded the summits of ancient Holland elms. For a long while there was no movement, save the flutter of a straw caught in the cobbles. The A.P.M. fidgeted. There was no sound but the classes next door, the wind in the street, the faint tremor of the window-

panes, in response to some distant inaudible shelling.

"You wouldn't think there was a war going on within twenty miles?"

"Twenty kilometres, sir!"

"Is it possible? Are we going to wait all day, Dormer?"

"No, sir, only a moment; the people of the house can't be far off, but the door behind the bar is locked. I don't want to go into the school myself, Blanquart won't like it, and one wants to keep on the right side of him."

"Why won't he like it? He'll have to."

"The children get out of hand, sir, at the sight of a uniform. I've noticed it when I've been billeting."

"Do they?"

"Yes, sir; it's all fun to them still."

"Is it?" The A.P.M. grimaced and began reading the signs over the little shops: "*Charcuterie*—what's that?"

"Baked-meat shop. Pork-butcher's we should call it, sir!"

"*Quincaillerie*."

"Hardware!"

"Who's this, coming across the square?"

"Belgian refugee, sir!"

Dormer had no doubt about it. The heavy round-shouldered figure, the mouth hanging loosely open, the bundle carried under the arm, the clumsy boots, the clothes apparently suspended round the waist by a string. Her story was written all over her: turned out of some Walloon or Flemish farm or town, at the approach of the Germans—tramping along a road with a retreating army all mixed up with a nation on the move, she had lost home, parents, occupation, all in a few hours, and was glad to get board and bed and any odd job that she could do.

"Is this the sort of person we have to interview?"

"Oh no, sir. Different type!"

The woman showed some mild interest at the sight of the car, and exchanged banter in pidgin English with the chauffeur and policeman. The invitation from the latter "promenade," and the smiling, flattered refusal "promenade no bon!" could be heard. Then she entered and stood before them.

"*Bonjour*, offizer, what you want?"

"Will you kindly tell the Maire's Secretary one waits to see him."

"You want billets?" in English. "Billets na poo!"

"No!" Dormer was always piqued when his French was disregarded or misunderstood. "We want M. Blanquart!"

"All right." She returned with him in a moment.

"M. Blanquart, we have been to the farm and seen Vanderlynden. He's very busy, and we didn't get much out of him, but we gather his daughter has left home. Do you know her address?"

A look of incredulity visited the face of the schoolmaster. He pointed across the square. "There. She has taken the 'Lion of Flanders.' She gives lunch to officers!"

When this was conveyed to the A.P.M. he was considerably annoyed. "Why couldn't that old fool Vander what's his name say so?"

Blanquart understood perfectly, not only the words, but the feeling. "Ah, Monsieur, there you have the peasant. I have lived among them all my life. I am not of them, I am from St.

Omer, but I know them well. They are like that. They are thrashing. They are sowing. They cannot attend to anything else, even if it be their own business. You and I shall be treated like the weather, something to be used or avoided . . ."

But the A.P.M. had stepped out of the Estaminet de la Mairie. Dormer lingered, just sufficiently to say:

"We are much obliged, M. Blanquart, we will attend to the affair." For he had been brought up to behave as a little gentleman and knew that politeness cost nothing and that he might require the Secretary of the Mairie again.

Outside, the chauffeur was busy underneath the car, the policeman stood beside it, legs apart, hands clasped behind his back, face expressing absolutely nothing. In a few strides Dormer caught up to the A.P.M.

"This lady speaks good English, sir. No doubt you will conduct the inquiry yourself?"

"I hope so, if we really have found the person at last. We've wasted nearly the whole morning."

Dormer was relieved; his mind, always inclined to run a little in advance, had already

arrived at the point at which some one would have to ask this woman:

"Are you the victim of this shocking crime?" He didn't want to do it, for he felt that it was the A.P.M.'s business.

The two officers entered the Café-Restaurant of the "Lion of Flanders." The whole of the ground floor, a long, low room looking out into the Grand' Place, had been cleared and set with little tables. Round the desk from which the Patronne supervised the business, one or two officers from neighbouring billets were drinking mixed vermouth. The air was redolent of preparation, and it was only because they remained standing that the A.P.M. and Dormer attracted attention. Finally, a rough middle-aged woman in an apron asked what she could do for these gentlemen. Feeling the subject to be increasingly delicate, Dormer ordered two mixed vermouths and then asked if they might speak to Mademoiselle Vanderlynden upon business. The drinks were served, and behind them came the person required. No sooner had she come and inquired what was wanted, than Dormer wished to goodness she had not. He realized more than ever how difficult it would be to say

to such a person, "Are you the victim of the unmentionable crime?" But there she stood, quite good looking, imperturbable, a little impatient perhaps, obviously wanting to know without delay why she had been sent for in the middle of a busy morning. This was comforting in a sense; it showed there was something wrong with the whole atrocious story. On the other hand it was awkward, one had to go on and explain. So he pulled out the blue printed claim: the A.P.M. in spite of what had been said, left it to him.

"It is about this claim of your father's."

She took it, scrutinized it a moment, and handed it back:

"Ah, that." She was not helpful.

"You are of course familiar with the whole story?"

"Yes, I remember it all."

The A.P.M. was listening attentively, impressed by her glib, adequate English, and even more so by her personality. Dormer, on the other hand, was occupied with his own feelings.

"There is some mistake, is there not?"

"No, there is no mistake."

"The Major has come to see the—er—the damage!"

"I shall be pleased to go with you to the farm, after lunch."

"That's a jolly good idea," the A.P.M. broke in. "We'll have lunch here, and go and look at the damage afterwards."

"Very good. Will you take a chair, sir?" and she was gone.

"You see, it wasn't what you thought," the A.P.M. went on, finishing his drink at a gulp, and making Dormer feel, for the twentieth time, what a grossly unfair War it was.

The lunch was long, far more of the Flemish midday dinner than the French déjeuner. The A.P.M. took the lot, commented freely, enjoyed himself immensely. There were *hors d'œuvres* (sardines, beans in oil, some sort of sausage, a kind of horse-radish, "Wonder where the devil she gets 'em?" said the A.P.M.), soup (ordinary, but enlivened by parsley and bits of toast fried in fat and something, third cousin to a piece of garlic, "scrumptious"), veal and spinach (very good, but "no fish, pity!"). In a moment, Mademoiselle Vanderlynden stood over them.

"I am sorry, we have only sardines, they will not let the fish come by train!" Chicken and salad ("Excellent. Ah, they understand oil, the French"), little biscuits, coffee that dripped through a strainer into glasses, rum ("That's English, I bet!"), and Dormer, shy in such matters, and without social code, began wondering whether he could offer to pay.

He had learned during bitter years, one rule: "Always treat an A.P.M. if you can!" This had not been his preoccupation during the meal. He had been haunted by a tag of verse—from the "Ingoldsby Legends" which he certainly hadn't read for twenty years. He was not one to read "poetry." But neither had he a regular soldier's trained indifference. He knew where it was going to end, this quest on which they were engaged. Some poor brute, who had volunteered to come to this blessed country to fight the Germans, would be hauled out of some ghastly apology for a "rest" camp—if he were lucky—more likely out of some dug-out or cellar, or even from Hospital—placed under arrest—frightened dumb, if by any chance he had any speech in him, and finally tried by a court to whom he was a "Tommy" (the sort of person

who enlisted in the regular army because he was out of work), and sentenced to some penalty. And here was the A.P.M. eating and drinking with gusto. It reminded Dormer of:

Send for Trefooze, and Lieutenant Tregooze,
Send for Sir Carnaby Jenks of the Blues.
How much must I fork out, my trump,
For the whole first floor of the Magpie and Stump?

the rhyme of the drunken swells who couldn't even keep awake to see a man hanged. It was, however, the ideal state of mind for making war.

The A.P.M. was saying to Mademoiselle Vanderlynden: "The bill please, Madam," and when he got it, "By Gad, did we drink all that? Well, I don't grudge it."

So he was going to pay. The room was emptying now, there were no troops in the village, and most of the officers lunching there (with shy propitiatory looks toward the A.P.M.) had some way to ride to get back to their units. Here was Mademoiselle ready to go and show them the damage. She wore no hat, but her clothes were good of their kind and she carried the day's takings clasped to her breast, in a solid little leather dolly-bag, far from new. The A.P.M. allowed

her the rare privilege of a lift in the car. They went back over the same road that the two officers had followed in the morning. Once more Dormer had his queer feelings. There was something wrong about this. Three times over the same road and nothing done. As they turned into the by-road, Mademoiselle Vanderlynden held up her hand. "Stop here, please!"

They were at the corner of the big pasture before the house. There was an ordinary hedge, like an English one, thickened at this angle into a tiny copse, with a dozen young poplars. Mademoiselle soon found a gap in the fence and led them through, remarking, "The troops made this short cut!"

They found themselves in Vanderlynden's pasture, like hundreds of others over a hundred miles of country. There were no troops in it at the moment, but it had the air of being continuously occupied. In long regular lines the grass had been trampled away. Posts and wire, and a great bank of manure marked the site of horse-lines. Nearer the house, tents had been set up from time to time, and circles, dotted with peg and post holes, appeared half obliterated. At the corners of the field were latrines, and

at one spot the cookers had blackened everything.

"Billets for the troops!" reflected Dormer, to whom the idea of lodging in the open had never ceased to be a thoroughly bad joke. "Stables for horses, stables for men!" Obviously enough the machinery of War had been here in full swing. Dormer (a man of no imagination) could almost see before him the khaki-clad figures, the sullen mules, the primitive vehicles filing into the place, tarrying ever so briefly and filing out again to be destroyed. But Mademoiselle Vanderlynden was occupied with the matter in hand, and led to the other side of the coppice, where there had been built by some previous generations of pious Vanderlyndens a little shrine. It was perhaps eight feet high, six feet thick, and had its glazed recess towards the main road. But the glazing was all broken, the altar torn down, and all those small wax or plaster figures or flowers, vases, and other objects of the trade in "votive offerings" and *objets de piété* which a Vanderlynden would revere so much more because he bought them at a *fournitures ecclési-astiques*, rather than made them with his own hands, were missing. Army wire had been used to fasten up the gaping aperture.

"There you are," said Mademoiselle. She added, as if there might be some doubt as to ownership. "You can see that it is ours. Here is our name, not our proprietor's!"

Sure enough, on a flat plaster panel was a partially effaced inscription. "Marie Bienheureuse—prie pour—de Benoit Vanderl—femme Marthe—Juin 187——"

The A.P.M. lighted a cigar, and surveyed the ruins. He was feeling extremely well, and was able to take a detached unofficial attitude. "Oh, so that's the Virgin, is it?"

"No. That is the place for the image. The image is broken, as I told you, and we removed the pieces."

"Very good. Then I understand you claim a thousand francs for the damage to the brickwork and the—er—altar furniture which was—ah, broken—it seems too much, you know!"

"Perhaps, sir, you are not well ack-vainted with the price of building materials!" (Ah, thought Dormer, she speaks pretty good English, but that word did her.)

"Oh, I think so, I'm a bit of a farmer myself,

you know. I have a place in Hampshire, where I breed cattle."

Mademoiselle's voice seemed to rise and harden:

"Yes, sir; but if you are rich, that is not a reason that you should deny justice to us, who are poor. I do not know if I can get this altar repaired, and even if I can there is also the question of the *effraction*——"

"The what?"

"Legal damages for breaking in—trespass, sir," put in Dormer, alarmed by the use of French. He could see she was getting annoyed, and wished the A.P.M., the lunch, the claim, the farm and the War, all the blessed caboodle, were with the devil.

"Oh, I see."

"*Et puis*, and then there are *dédommagements*—what would you say if I were to knock down your Mother's tomb?"

"What's that? Oh, I can't say, I'm sure. I really can't go into all this. Captain Dormer, there is obviously no arrest to be made. It is purely a claim for compensation. I will leave it to you. I must be getting back. *Comprenez*,

Mademoiselle, this officer will hear what you have to say and will settle the whole matter with you. Famous lunch you gave us. Au revoir. If you care for a game of bridge this evening, Dormer, come around to B Mess!"

Dormer took out his field notebook and conducted the inquiry partly in English, partly in French.

They sat in the cavernous old tiled kitchen, half-filled with the stove and its stupefying heat, half with the table, scrubbed until the grain of the wood stood out in ribs.

Mademoiselle Vanderlynden had dismissed the A.P.M. from her mind with the remark that he was a droll type, and gave Dormer her full attention, rather as if he had been a dull boy in the lowest class, and she his teacher.

"When did this occur?"

"Why, in April. It was wet, or he would not have done it!"

"Did you see it done?"

"Yes. I even tried to stop it!"

"Where were you?"

"Why naturally I was at that hole in the fence. One cannot always hire a boy to keep the cattle from straying."

"Well?"

"Well, then the troops came in. They were not pretty to see!"

"What troops were they?'

She turned over a dirty dog-eared memorandum book.

"469 Trench Mortar Battery."

"So they had had a bad time?"

"One gathered that. They were very few, and some of their material was missing. At the last came this man with his two mules. One was sick, one was wounded. Most of the men, as soon as they had put up their animals, fell down and slept, but this one kept walking about. It was almost dark and it was beginning to rain. I asked him what he wanted."

"What did he say?"

" 'To Hell with the Pope!' "

The shibboleth sounded so queer on her lips that Dormer glanced at her face. It was blank. She had merely memorized the words in case they might be of use to her. She went on:

"He did not like the images on the altar! Then he began to break the glass, and pull down the woodwork. One saw what he wanted. It was shelter for his mules."

"You cautioned him that he was doing wrong?"

"I believe you. I even held him by the arm."

"That was wrong of you, Mademoiselle. You should have informed his officer."

"Oh, you must understand that his officer was asleep on the kitchen floor. But so asleep. He lay where he had fallen, he had not let go the mug from which he drank his whisky. So much —(she held up four graphic fingers)—ah, but whisky you know!"

"I see. You were unable to report to the officer in charge of the party. But still, you should never touch a soldier. He might do you an injury, and then, at the court of inquiry, it would be said against you that you laid hands on him."

"Oh, you understand, one is not afraid, one has seen so many soldiers these years. And as for the court of inquiry, we have had four here, about various matters. They all ended in nothing."

"Well, well, you endeavoured to prevent the damage, and being unable to report to the proper authority, you made your claim for damage in due course. But when the officer woke up, you informed him that you had done so?"

"Why necessarily, since we had the Maire to make a *procès-verbal!*"

"So I hear, from the Maire himself. But apparently the Maire did not do so, for the *procès-verbal* is not included with the other papers."

"No, the Maire was prevented by the troops. (A grim smile broke for a moment the calculated business indifference on the face of one who excluded emotion, because it was a bad way of obtaining money.) Oh, la-la! There was a *contretemps!*"

"Do you mind telling me what occurred?"

She seemed to regret that brief smile, and apologized to herself.

"All the same, it was shameful. Our Maire is no better than any other, but he is our Maire. One ought to respect those in power, ought not one, sir?"

"In what way were the troops lacking in respect?"

"They sang. They sang—*casse-tête*—enough to split your head, all the way to the village!"

"Oh, they were on the move, were they?"

"It was pitiable, I assure you, sir, it was shameful to see. *Ces pauvres êtres.* They hardly had

any sleep. Only a few hours. Then it seems the Bosche made a counter-attack, and paff! here comes a motor-cyclist, and they were obliged to wake up and fall in. Some of them could only stand up with difficulty. But at length, they were ready; then the Maire came. We had sent for him *d'urgence*, when we saw the troops were going, because you can't make a *procès-verbal* of a person who is no longer there!"

"No, quite right. But why did they sing?"

"Ah, *ca tombait d'accord.* Just as the officer gives the word, the Maire arrives. We had informed him it was a crime of violence, and he had taken it very serious. He is old, our Maire. He had put on his—*écharpe*."

"What is that?"

She made a vivid gesture with her hands.

"It goes so! It is tri-colour. It is the Maire's official dress!"

"Ah, his official scarf!"

"That is it. Also he had mounted his hat!"

"How did he do that?"

"The usual way. But it was a long hat, a hat of *grande tenue*—like a pot of confiture."

"Mademoiselle, this will not do. I cannot settle this matter here and now, I must pass on all

the papers to my superior officer, who will place them with the proper authority. They will ask 'Is there no *procès-verbal?*' Am I to say: 'The Maire went to make one. He put on his hat and the troops began to sing.' It sounds like a joke."

"Ah, you others, you are always the ones to laugh. It was just exactly as I have said. They sang!"

"But you told me just now that they were tired out!"

"Quite true!"

"It will never sound so. What did they sing?"

"Old Hindenburg has bought a hat!"

In a moment Dormer was convinced. The words painted, framed and hung the picture for him. He had just been beginning to hope that the whole thing would break down from sheer improbability. He now saw it stamped and certified with eternal truth. There was no need for her to add: "They were not gay, you understand, they were *exalté!*"

"Excited!"

"Ah! Excited, like one is after no sleep and no food and then something very strange. They were excited. They called the Maire 'Maréchal Hindenburg,' and 'Bosche,' and 'Spy.' Those are

words that ought not to be used between allies!"

"No, Mademoiselle, they ought not."

But for a moment, the hardness left her face, she became almost impersonal.

"It was curious. They sang that—*sur une aire de psaume*, to a church tune."

"Yes, yes!" agreed Dormer. Out of the depth of his experience as a churchwarden welled up the strains of Whitefield, No. 671, and out of the depths of his experiences as a platoon commander came a sigh: "They will do it."

He went through his notes to see if there were anything more he wanted to know, but from business habit he had already possessed himself of the essentials. He did not like the way the thing was shaping. He knew only too well what happened in the army. Some individual being, besides a number on a pay roll, a human creature, would do something quite natural, perhaps rather useful, something which a mile or two farther on, in the trenches, would be worth, and might occasionally gain, the Military Medal. This business of breaking down a bit of wood and plaster, to shelter mules, had it occurred a little farther on, had it been a matter of making a machine-gun emplacement in an emergency, would have earned

praise. It showed just that sort of initiative one wanted in War-time, and which was none too easy to get from an army of respectable civilians. But at the same time, in billets, there was another set of rules just as important, which in their essence discouraged initiative and reduced the soldier to a mere automaton. The otherwise excellent thing which he did broke those rules. That again did not matter much, unless it was brought into accidental prominence by colliding with some other event or function—this Maire and his dignity for instance, would play the very devil, make a mountain out of a molehill, such was the perversity of things. Fascinated against his better judgment which told him "The less you know about the business, the better," he found himself asking:

"What was this man like, Mademoiselle?"

There was no answer, and he looked up. She had left him, gone into the back kitchen to some job of her own. She had left him as though the War were some expensive hobby of his that she really could not be bothered with any longer. On hearing his voice she returned and he repeated his question. He never forgot the answer.

"Like—but he was like all the others!"

"You couldn't pick him out in a crowd?"

"Perhaps. But it would be difficult. He was about as big as you, not very fat, he had eyes and hair like you or anyone else."

"You didn't, of course, hear his name or number?"

"They called him 'Nobby.' It was his name, but they call every one 'Nobby.' His number was 6494. I saw it on his valise."

"On his pack?"

"Yes."

"Thank you, Mademoiselle. You have told me all I want." In his heart he feared she had told him much too much, but she had gone on with her work. He rose to go, but passing the dark entry of the back kitchen, he stopped, as though to avoid a shell. He thought he saw a headless figure, but it was only a shirt which Mademoiselle Vanderlynden had flung over a line before putting it through the wringer. He went out. She did not accompany him. She was busy, no doubt.

He had to walk to the main road, but once there, found no difficulty in "jumping" a lorry that took him back to Divisional Head-quarters. On the steps of the Town Hall he crossed the

A.P.M. It was very late for that functionary to be about. He had not even changed into "slacks."

"Hullo, young feller, you got back then?"

"Yes, sir." Dormer rather wanted to say, "No, sir, I'm not here, I'm at the farm where you left me."

The A.P.M. passed on, but turned to call out: "No bridge to-night. We're on the move!"

So it seemed. The interior of the old building was in confusion. The Quartermaster-Sergeant was burning orders, schedules, rolls and parade states of the Corps they were leaving. Signallers were packing their apparatus, batmen were folding beds and stuffing valises. Policemen were galvanized into a momentary activity.

To Dormer it was the old, old lesson of the War. Never do anything, it is always too late. He had been bound, by a careful civilian conscience, to try to get to the bottom of the matter. He might just as well have torn it up and let it take its chance. No, the Vanderlyndens would never let it rest until they got some sort of satisfaction. The Mayor, and the French Mission and Heaven knows who else would have something to say. He wrote a brief but careful re-

port, and sent the thing off to an authority at Boulogne who dealt with such matters.

The weeks that followed were full of education for Dormer's detached, civilian mind. Accustomed to be part of a battalion, almost a close family circle of known faces and habits, then associated with the staff of a division that stuck in one place, he had never before seen an army, and that army almost a nation, on the move. Under his eyes, partly by his effort, fifteen thousand English-speaking males, with the proper number of animals and vehicles, impedimenta, movable or fixed, had got into trains, and got out of them again, and marched or been conveyed to a place where Dormer had to take leave of all preconceived notions of life.

No-Man's-Land, with trenches beside it, he was familiar with, but here were miles of had-been No-Man's-Land, grassless, houseless, ploughed into brown undulations like waves of the sea by the barrages that had fallen upon it; covered with tents and huts, divided by wandering rivers of mud or dust, which had been at some distant time, weeks before, roads. Into

this had poured, like the division to which he was attached, forty other divisions, always in motion, always flowing from the railhead behind, up to the guns in front, shedding half the human material of which they were composed, and ebbing back to the railhead to go elsewhere.

He came to rest in a tiny dug-out on a hill-side of loose chalk, which he shared with a signal officer, and past which, at all hours of the day and night, there passed men, men, men, mules, men, guns, men, mules, limbers, men, men, men.

At least this is how they appeared to him. Forced by Nature to sleep for some of the hours of darkness, and forced by the Germans to be still for all the clearest of the daylight, it was at the spells of dusk and dawn that he became busiest, and that infernal procession was ever before his eyes. It was endless. It was hopeless. By no means could his prim middle-class mind get to like or admire anything so far from the defined comfort and unvarying security to which he belonged and to which he longed to return. It was useless. With the precision of a machine, that procession was duplicated by another moving in the opposite direction. Lorries, ambulances, stretchers, men, men, guns, limbers,

men, men, men. The raw material went up. The finished article came back. Dormer and his companion and their like, over twenty miles of line, sorted and sifted and kept the stream in motion.

That companion of his was not the least of his grievances. The fellow was no Dormer, he was opposite by name and nature. His name was Kavanagh, and one of the meagre comforts Dormer got was by thinking of him as a d——d Irishman. He was, or had been going to be, a schoolmaster, and next to nature (or nationality), the worst thing about him was he would talk. And he would *not* keep his hands still. Two things that Dormer most gravely disapproved of, and which he attributed in equal shares to lack of experience of the world, and too much signalling.

His talk was such tripe, too! He never lost a moment. He started first thing in the morning. All the traffic that was going up forward was gone. The earth was empty, save for anti-aircraft guns pop-popping at planes high in the Italian blue. Dormer had shaved and breakfasted and hoped to catch up some of the sleep he had lost during the night. But would that fellow allow that? No. Listen to him now,

under the tiny lean-to they had contrived, by the dug-out steps, for washing purposes. He was —reciting—would one call it?

"The last tatoo is beating, boys,
The pickets are fast retreating, boys,
Let every man
Fill up his can
And drink to our next merry meeting, boys!"

"Do you call that poetry?"

"No."

This was rather awkward. Dormer had intended a snub. Not caring for poetry himself, he had tried to take a high line. He went on lamely:

"Oh! What do you call it then?"

"A most amazing picture of the mentality of 1815. Compare it with that of 1915. In that old war of ours against the French, we swore, we drank, we conquered. What do you think that same fellow would have to write about us to-day?"

"He wouldn't," put in Dormer, without avail.

"Something like this:

" 'Z day is fast approaching, boys,
In gas-drill we want coaching, boys,
Our iron ration
Will soon be in fashion.'

What rhymes to coaching?"

"How should I know?"

"Joking apart, Dormer!" (As if Dormer had been joking.) "Do you catch the impulse of the slogan? Of course, iron rations and gas helmets make a much more efficient soldier than drums and bayonets and rum, but the zest is all gone!"

Dormer did not reply; a belated party of engineers of some special service were passing up the road, and from where he lay in the dugout he could see khaki-covered bodies upon dusty legs, but no heads, the beam of the entrance was too low. Suddenly he said:

"Did you ever dream that the army was like a giant without a head?"

"What did you say?"

Good gracious, what had he said? He replied, "Oh, nothing," and bit his lips. It must be want of sleep. Fortunately Kavanagh did not hear. He was going on with his poetry.

> "The Colonel, so gaily prancing, boys
> Has a wonderful way of advancing, boys,
> Sings out so large
> Fix bayonets and cha-a-a-rge,
> It sets all the Frenchmen a-dancing, boys!

"What days they must have been, Dormer! You ought to have been a Colonel. Can't you see yourself on a big brown horse, gaily prancing? There ought to be a school for gaiety, just as there is for bayonet fighting and bombing. Can't you imagine yourself in a shako, like a top hat, with the brim in front only, glazed, with whacking great numerals?"

Dormer wanted to say: 'You've got a marvellous imagination!" which would have been intended as an unfavourable criticism. But the words stuck on his lips. Instead he said:

"It's all very well. You don't seem to see the serious part of all this—waste!"

"Waste, my dear fellow!" And to Dormer the harsh, cheerful voice had all the officious familiarity of a starling, gibing at one from an apple tree. "Waste is not serious. It is nature's oldest joke. It used to be called Chaos. From it we came. Back to it we shall go. It will be called Immortality. The Graves Commission will give it a number, a signboard, and a place on the map, but it will be Immortality none the less. From Titans to tight 'uns, 'each in his narrow grave.' "

"Oh, chuck it," said Dormer, disgusted and

having no memories of that quotation. "You've evidently never been in charge of a burying party!"

"I have. I did twelve months in the line, as a platoon commander. How long did you do that?"

"Twelve months about!"

"I believe you, where thousands wouldn't. Twelve months was about the limit. In twelve months, the average Infantry subaltern got a job, or got a blighty! I know all about it!"

"Then you ought to know better than to speak so. It's not a joke!"

"My dear Dormer, if it were not a grim joke it would be utterly unbearable."

"I disagree entirely. It's that point of view that we are suffering from so much. You don't seem to see that this army is not an army of soldiers. It is an army of civilians enlisted under a definite contract. They aren't here for fun."

"Oh, come Dormer, don't you believe in enjoying the War?"

"I believe in getting it done."

"You never will, in that frame of mind."

"Oh, shan't I? What would happen if I

didn't see that the right people get to the right place, with the right orders and right supplies, including you and your blessed flagwaggers?"

"Nothing to what will happen if the troops once begin to regard the show as a matter of business! You haven't got a shako and a big brown horse, but you must play up, as if you had!"

"What rot you talk. I have a tin hat because it will stand shrapnel better than a shako. I have mules because they stand the life better than a horse!"

"Yes, but do you admire your tin hat? Do you really care for mules!"

Something made Dormer say in spite of himself:

"I did once come across a man who cared!"

"There, what did I tell you. He was winning the War!"

("Whatever did I tell him that for?" Dormer asked himself vexedly. "A nice song he'll make of it.") But he only said:

"You're all wrong, as usual. He did nothing of the sort. He just made a row in billets!"

"Quite right too. Most of 'em deserve a row!"

"Possibly, but he went the wrong way to work!"

"Ah, that depends!"

(Irritating brute!)

"No, it doesn't. Were you ever at Ypres?"

"Was I not. I was hit at Hooge stables, and had to walk nearly a couple of miles to get to a dressing station!"

"Well, then, you remember, in the back billets, a place called the 'Spanish Farm'?"

"Don't I just. Great big old house, with a moat, and pasture fore and aft."

What a way to put it!

"Well, this chap I'm telling you of was billeted there. He was attached to a Trench Mortar Battery. He was in charge of the mules. He didn't talk a lot of rot about it, as you suggest he should. One of his mules was wounded and the other sick. He broke down the front of the shrine at the corner of the pasture to get a bit of shelter for them!"

The effect of this recital was not what Dormer expected.

"That was an unspeakably shocking thing to do, worse than losing any number of mules!"

"I suppose you're a Catholic?"

"Yes, I am!"

"I thought as much. Well, I'm not, nor was this driver I'm telling you about. He just hated the waste and destruction of it all."

"So he destroyed something more precious and permanent."

"He thought a live mule was better than a dead saint."

"He was wrong!"

And then the fellow shut up, got quite sulky. Dormer was delighted with his prowess in argument, waited a moment, turned on his side, and slept, as only men can who live in the open air, in continual danger of their lives, and who lose the greater portion of the night in ceaseless activity.

When his servant woke him, with tea and orders and the nightly lists of traffic and stores, it was a wonderful golden and green sunset, tremulous with the evening "hate." The purple shadows were just sufficiently long to admit of getting the wounded back, and the road was filled with ambulances, whirring and grinding as they stopped, backed, and restarted, while a steady punctual crash, once a minute, showed

that the Bosche were shelling the road or one of the innumerable camps or dumps along it, in the neighbourhood. Amid all this clamour, Kavanagh was not silenced, but recited at the top of his voice, and Dormer had a suspicion that the real reason was that it helped to keep down the nervousness that grew on men, as the years of the War rolled on, and the probability of being hit increased. Especially as, far overhead, the planes that circled and swooped like a swarm of gleaming flies, were attracting considerable anti-aircraft fire, and all round, big jagged bits were coming to earth with a noise almost echoing that of the ambulances.

Dormer's tidy mind was soon called into action. Some wounded who had died on the way to the dressing station, had been laid out beside the road as the ambulances had enough to do without carrying corpses ten miles. He went to make sure the M.O. had arranged for a burial party, as he had the strongest belief that casualties lying about were bad for the morale of the troops. When he got back to the dug-out, Kavanagh was "going on," as he bent over a map of the extensions of the divisional cable lines, like a crow on a gate.

"See those chaps, Dormer?"

> "Quis procul hinc—the legends writ
> The—er—Picard grave is far away,
> Quis ante diem perii·
> Sed miles, sed pro patria."

"Do you believe in pronouncing Latin like Julius Cæsar or like Jones Minor?"

"I don't believe in it at all. Pure waste of time!"

"Dormer, you are a Utilitarian!"

"Have it your own way so long as you get that cable line of yours sited. I've got parties coming up to-morrow to dig it in."

"I shall be ready for them. Think of all that language, and language is only codified thought, buried in the ground, Dormer!"

"I have all the thinking I want over all the men buried in the ground. We're losing far too many!"

The "victory" of the Somme had been a saddening experience for Dormer.

"That shows how wrong you are. We are mortal. We perish. But our words will live."

"Rot! Do you mean to say that '825 Brigade relieve you to-morrow Nth. Div. Ack, ack, ack,'

will live! Why should it? It'll be superseded in four days. Who wants to perpetuate it?"

"I disagree with you, Dormer, I really do. Here we are at the great crisis of our lives, of the life of European Civilization perhaps. Some trumpery order you or I transmit may mean in reality 'Civilization is defeated, Barbarism has won!' or it may mean, I hope, 'Lift up your eyes unto the hills from whence——"

"I wish you wouldn't joke about the Bible!"

"I'm not joking, and you'll find it out before long. Men will fight so long as they've got something to fight about!"

"Well, they have. They want to get home. They'll fight fast enough about that."

"Not they. That isn't the thing to make 'em fight. It's more likely to make 'em run away. They want an idea."

"They've had enough ideas, I should think. I seem to remember the walls covered with posters, with an idea apiece."

"Those ideas were much too superficial and temporary. They want to feel that they are something, or that they do something so important that it doesn't matter whether they live or die!"

"That's all wrong. It does matter. This

War will be won by the side that has most men and most stuff left."

"Nonsense. It will be won by the side that has the most faith."

"Oh, well, you go and have faith in your cable line. I've got to have it in these working parties."

It was now dusk enough for the main body of troops to get on the move. The broad valley below was in ultramarine shadow, the round shoulders of the down touched with lemon-coloured afterglow. Up the drift of chalk dust that represented where the road had once been, an insignificant parish road from one little village to another, but now the main traffic artery of an Army Corps, there came pouring the ceaseless stream, men, men, men, limbers, men, mules, guns, men.

The longer he looked at them, the more certain he became that he was right. Not merely the specialists in mechanics, engineers, ordnance, signals, gunners, but the mere infantry had taken months to train, and could be knocked out in a moment. The problem, of course, was to save them up until the moment at which they could produce the maximum effect.

How docile they were. Platoon for this, platoon for that, section of engineers, then a machine-gun company. Then rations, then limbers, wagons, hand-carts full of every conceivable kind of implement or material. Very soon he was obliged to stand in the middle of the road, with the stream of traffic going up, before him, and the stream of traffic coming back, behind, so that in addition to checking and directing one lot he had to keep an eye on the other to see that they did not begin to smoke until they were well down the side of the hill. Gradually the darkness thickened, and the crowd thinned, and the thunder of the front died down. At length he was left with only a belated hurrying limber or two, or ambulance, sent back for the third or fourth time to clear the accumulation of casualties. At last he felt justified in getting into his bunk and shutting his eyes.

Thank goodness that fellow wasn't back. He, Dormer, would be asleep, and would not hear him. He counted the khaki shoulders and dusty wheels that went round and round beneath his eyelids, until he went off.

Unfortunately for that particular *malaise* which the War occasioned to his precise and town-

bred spirit, that was not his last sleep that he slept that night. Many a one never woke again to hear the earth-shaking clamour of the barrage, to see that eternal procession of men, men, mules, limbers, men, guns, ambulances, men, lorries, going on and on like some gigantic frieze. But Dormer did. He was one of those who, had he been born in the Middle Ages, would have been described as under a curse, or pictured as working out an atonement for his own or some one else's misdeeds. He had to go on doing his very best, and the more he disliked the whole business the harder he worked. The harder he worked the longer it seemed to that desired day when he might return to the quiet niceties of a branch bank in a provincial town. And all the time Kavanagh kept up that ceaseless argument as to one's mental attitude. Dormer didn't really believe in having such a thing, for he felt bound to join issue with the absurd ramblings of the other, and he could not escape, because their jobs naturally threw them together and because he secretly admired the way that Kavanagh did his work.

So the days turned into weeks and the weeks into months, the casualty lists grew longer and

longer, the visible fruits of the immense effort grew smaller and smaller, and as the year wore on, the weather broke, and the only conditions that make life in the open tolerable, light and drought, disappeared, and they dwelt in the sodden twilight of tent or hut, while what had been the white powdery dust, became the cement-like mud that no scraping could remove. Sitting dejectedly over some returns he heard

"Still, be still, my soul, the arms you bear are brittle!"

"It's all very well to sit there and sing. This offensive is a failure, we shall never get through."

"I'm afraid you're right, Dormer. I told you how it would be. I hope we shall learn the lesson."

"It means another winter in the trenches."

"Evidently."

"It's very bad for the men. They've nothing to show for all that's been done."

"That's nothing new.

" 'I'm sick of parading,
Through cold and wet wading,
Or standing all day to be shot in a trench!
I'm tired of marching,

> Pipe-claying and starching,
> How neat we must be to be shot by the French.'

That's what the men thought of it a hundred years ago. Then, they had to pipeclay their belts, two whacking great chest-constricting cross-belts. And their officers didn't arrange for them to play football, every time they went out to rest. In fact they didn't go out to rest. They just stayed in the line."

"It wasn't very dangerous, was it?"

"There wasn't the shell fire, of course, but what about disease?"

"They were regulars."

"My dear fellow, when is a soldier not a soldier?"

"I don't like riddles."

"This is a serious question. How long will the War last?"

"Oh," cried Dormer bitterly, "another two years, I suppose."

"You're about twenty wrong. We shall have conscription shortly, then the real strength will be put into the fight and will compensate for the losses of France and the inertia of Russia. We shall then settle down to the real struggle between England and Germany for the markets of the world.

Dormer frowned. "You're a Socialist," he said.

"Never mind my opinions. It won't matter by the time we get back into civvys what we are!"

Something rose up in Dormer. He said with certainty:

"You're wrong. The men'll never stand it. Two years at most."

"The men stood it very well in the Peninsular for six years, and most of them had been fighting somewhere or other for the previous quarter of a century."

"Once again, they were regulars."

"Once again, so are you.

" 'For gold the sailor ploughs the main,
The farmer ploughs the manor,
The brave poor soldier ne'er disdain,
That keeps his country's honour!'

That's you to the life, Dormer. Twenty years hence you'll be a bronzed veteran, in a dirty uniform, with a quarter of a century's polish on your Sam Browne. You have already had more iron whiz past your head than any regular soldier gets in a lifetime, or even the lifetime of two or three generations. You've had a practical

experience of war that any general might envy. The only complaint I have to make against you is that you're conducting the whole business as if you were back in your beastly bank, instead of, as the song says, behaving as one 'That keeps his country's honour!' "

"That's all nonsense. I've just sent the 561 Brigade to occupy the new line that was taken up after the stunt last Thursday. You know what it's like. It's the remains of a German trench turned round, so that they have all the observation. They've strafed it to Hell, and we are firing on photographs of trenches that are probably empty. It's all nonsense to say the defending side loses more men than the attacking. That's true while the attack is in progress, but an attack in its very nature cannot last long, and then the defenders get their own back."

As he said the words they were enveloped in an explosion that shook the wet out of the canvas upon them, and whose aftermath of falling débris was echoed by stampeded traffic in the road.

"The Bosche seem set on proving you right," laughed Kavanagh. "They forget, as you do, that sooner or later, an attack gets through and ends the War."

"Not this one. Nothing but no more reserves will end this. And that may happen to both sides at once. It may all end in stalemate!"

"If it does, we shall fight again. We represent Right. The enemy represents Wrong. Don't you ever forget that for a moment."

"I don't. I believe we are in the right, or I should never have joined up." When really moved, there came into Dormer's grey inexpressive face, a queer light, that might have made the Germans pause, had they seen it. He was a man of few theories, but he was literally ready to die for those few, when they were attacked. He went on shyly: "But I don't believe in war as a permanent means of settling 'disputes.' "

"Bravo!" cried Kavanagh. "I like you when you speak out. I only wish you did more of it. You're quite right, but what you don't see is that modern society is so rotten that it can only be kept alive by violent purges, credit cycles, strikes, and wars. If it were not for such drastic remedies people of the twentieth century would perish of ease and comfort."

"Come, ease and comfort never killed anyone."

"Spiritually!"

"Oh, I don't go in for spiritualism!" Dormer

was saying, when his servant brought him his tea. There was bread, that had rolled on the floor of a lorry until it tasted of dust, oil, blood, and coal. There was butter. There was marmalade. There was some cake they had sent him from home. Leaning his elbows on the board on which they wrote, he held his enamel mug in both hands and swilled his chlorinated-water, condensed-milk tasting tea. For the first time, as he clasped the mug and filled his gullet, he was warm, hands, mouth, neck, stomach, gradually all his being. He put the mug down nearly empty and shoved the cake over to Kavanagh. "Have some?" he mumbled.

They found themselves in a village of the Somme country, hardly recognizable for the division that had come there for the offensive, five months before. Just infantry, with the necessary services, without artillery, or cavalry, they were billeted in barns and cottages up and down a narrow valley, with cliff-like downs rising each side and a shallow, rapid stream flowing between poplars and osier beds at the bottom. Dormer was entrusted with the critical military operation

of organizing Football, Boxing and entertainment, and spent his time to his great satisfaction, up and down the three miles of road that ran through the Divisional Area, notebook in hand, listing the battalions or companies as entering for one or another of these sports. He liked it and it suited him.

Mildly interested in sport as such, what he liked about his job was that it kept his feet warm and his mind employed and he arranged so that his daily journey ended sufficiently far from Headquarters for some hospitable unit to say, "Oh, stop and have lunch!" It would then be a nice walk back, a quiet hour or so, getting the correspondence into shape before the Colonel returned from the afternoon ride, by which time he shook down his lunch and made a place for his dinner. After that would be tea, orders to sign and circulate, mess, a game of cards, and another day would be done. He had long found out that the great art of war lay not in killing Germans, but in killing time.

Over and over again, every day and all day, as he moved up and down those wintry roads, he looked at the faces of the men who knew now that the great offensive had resulted in infinitesimal

gains, enormous losses, and only approached the end of the War by so many weeks. He failed entirely to make out what was going on in their minds. Officers were always officially pleased to see him because he was attached to Divisional Head-quarters, because he came to talk about games, not about work, because he was, as he was perfectly conscious, one of the most difficult fellows in the world to quarrel with. He had never had any great bitterness in life, and was so averse to official "side" that he made an effort to appear as informal as possible. Sometimes N.C.O.s would be produced, consulted as to whether a team could be got together, what amount of special training could be allowed intending pugilists, without interfering with necessary drills and fatigues, what histrionic, (or to put it frankly), what music-hall talent could be found. The N.C.O.s were (of course) keen, smart, attentive, full of suggestions and information. They had to be. They kept their jobs by so being, and their jobs gave them just the opportunity to live about as well as lumbermen in the remote parts of North America, instead of existing like beasts in barns, not pet animals, not marketable produce, but just beasts, herded and disposed of,

counted and controlled, for such was the fate of the average infantryman, and war being what it is, there came a gradual acquiescence in it. It could be no other.

But all those plain soldiers, of whom only one or two per cent had even a voice in their entertainment, of what they thought, who knows? Dormer wondered. He wondered even more at himself. Why on earth, in the midst of a European War that had changed his whole existence so dramatically, he should want to go bothering his head about what was happening to other people he couldn't think, but he went on doing it. Otherwise the life suited him rather well, and with every fresh week that separated him from the offensive, a sort of balance so natural to the thoroughly balanced sort of person that he was, went on adjusting itself, and he found himself thinking that perhaps in the new year there might be a new chance, the French, the Russians, the Italians might do something, so might we. Then it would be over, and one could go home.

It was then that the inevitable happened. He knew it as soon as he got into the room at the Mairie that served for Q. office. He was so sure

that he stood turning over the correspondence on his desk, the usual pile of returns, orders, claims and indents, without reading them, certain that the Colonel was going to speak to him. At last the Colonel did speak:

"Look here, Dormer, I thought we settled this?"

There it was, the blue questionnaire form, the other memorandums, Divisional, Corps, Army French Mission, Base Authority, all saying "Passed to you please, for necessary action." With an absurd feeling that it did not matter what he said, or did, and that the whole thing was arranging itself without him, he got out:

"What is that, sir?"

"This—er—civilian claim for compensation. Something about a girl in a hayfield. What did you do, when we were up in Flanders?"

He rebelled so against the unfairness of it.

"Major Stevenage had the matter in hand. I went with him to the spot."

"What did you find?"

"It was not what I—you—we thought, sir. The words '*La Vierge*' were intended to convey that a shrine had been damaged."

"A shrine? Really. How odd the French

are? It was accidental, was it? Bad driving?"

"No, sir, not exactly. A driver wanted shelter for his mules——"

"Quite right, quite right."

"So he broke into the shrine——"

"Ah, that was a mistake, of course. Whatever were his unit about to let him?"

"The matter was not reported until later."

"Then they placed him under arrest and stoppages?"

"They were moved immediately, sir. But I didn't gather that any action was taken."

"But when Major Stevenage found it out?"

"It had happened so long before that he thought it was impossible to pursue the matter. So I made a report and sent it to the proper authority, to see if an ex. gratia payment could be made."

"And they have done nothing, of course. So the French Mission have dug it up again."

"Indeed, sir."

"Yes. Oh, I can't wade through all this. But I tell you what, young Dormer. You've got yourself involved in this correspondence, and I shouldn't be at all surprised if you didn't ever get out. I shouldn't really."

"I can't see that I've done anything wrong, sir."

"Can't you? Well it's no good your telling the French Mission that, I'm afraid. You might go and try to persuade 'em that there's a mistake, or an exaggeration, and get them to drop it. You'd better go and see them anyhow. They're at Flan! Take what's-his-name with you."

From this, Dormer, by long experience, understood that he was to go to Army Head-quarters and to take the Divisional French Liaison Officer with him. He neither liked nor disliked the job. It was the sort of thing one had to do in war-time and he was used to it. So he went down the little stony street to the pork-butcher's, where, upon the swing-gate that admitted one to the dank, greasy, appetizing interior, where every sort of out-of-the-way portion of the pig, lay cooked and smelling "sentimental," hung the placard "French Liaison Officer," with the number of the Division carefully smudged out. Here, blue-coated, booted and spurred, sat the French Liaison Officer, innumerable small printed sheets of instructions before him, carefully arranged on this pile or on that, while in between lay the cardboard-covered *dossiers*.

Dormer's immediate impression was: "Not enough to do. Passing the time away," but he had too much sympathy with such an attitude to say so. He was greeted with effusion:

"My dear Dormer, to what do I owe the pleasure?"

Dormer never liked effusion. He replied briefly:

"This," and threw the papers on the table.

It amused him to watch the change in the other's face from purely official politeness to perfectly genuine determination to keep out of it.

"Well, Dormer, you've heard of System D?"

He had to think whether it was Swedish gymnastics or a patent medicine.

"It means '*Debrouillez vous*,' or 'Don't get mixed up with it.' That is my advice to you. In any case I shall leave it alone. It is a matter of discipline purely."

"Quite so." Dormer did not care whether the sarcasm was obvious. "But I have received orders to go and see your Chief at Army Headquarters, and to take you with me. I suppose you don't mind going. It'll be a ride."

"I shall be delighted. I will go and tell my servant to have my horse round. I will introduce

you to Colonel Lepage. He is a man of excellent family."

"I thought you would," said Dormer to himself.

Accordingly they rode together. The Frenchman rode with style, being bound to show that he was of the class of officer who could ride, a sharp demarcation in his army. Dormer rode as he did everything else. He had learned it as part of his training, without enthusiasm, knowing that a motor-byke was a far better way of getting about. But he was careful of a horse as of anything else. They arrived at Flan. It was another little stone-built village. The only difference he could see between it and Louches, which they had just left, was that it stood on the top of a hill, the other along the bottom of a valley.

Its present temporary occupants, however, he could soon see to be a vastly different category. Every little house was placarded with the signs or marks of the offices or messes it contained. Very-well-groomed orderlies and signallers strolled or waited. Big cars and impeccable riding horses were being held or standing. They found the French Mission, got their horses held (instead of turning off the petrol, and kicking down a stand, thought Dormer) and entered.

It was the little Picard parlour of some small *rentier*, who, having sold beetroot to advantage during fifty years, found himself able at last to fold his shirt-sleeved arms, and from his window, or often from his doorway, to watch other people doing what he had done in the little paved Place.

He, of course, had gone to Brittany, Bordeaux, the Riviera, to be out of the sound of the guns that had killed his son, and his vacant place had been scheduled by a careful Maire as available for billeting. The French army, more impressed by orders, better trained, more experienced, had carefully removed every picture, book, or cushion and stored them in safety—where a British Mess would have left them—at least until they were broken or disappeared. At small tables sat two or three officers in azure, with three or more bars on the cuff. Dendrecourt halted before one of these, clicked his heels, and saluted, and asked if he might present the Captain Dormer, of the English Army. Colonel Lepage rose with effusion, excessively English:

"My dear Dormer, charmed to meet you. Sit down. What can we do for you?"

"I have been sent to see you about a civilian claim for compensation."

"*L'affaire Vanderlynde!*" put in Dendrecourt.

"Aha!" The Colonel tapped his blotting-pad with a paper knife, and knitted his brows: "What have you to propose?"

"My General"—Dormer was sufficiently practised to avail himself of that fiction—"wished me to explain that this matter has been fully investigated."

"Ah! so we may shortly expect to hear that the guilty individual has been arrested?"

"Well, not exactly an arrest, sir. The whole affair rests upon a mistake."

"What sort of mistake?" The other officers gave up whatever they were doing, and gathered round at the tone of the last question.

"Upon investigation, it appears that the claim is not for—er—personal violence."

"I should be obliged if you define personal violence."

"That would take us rather far afield, sir. All I want to point out is that the expression '*La Vierge*' does not refer to Mademoiselle Vanderlynden, but to an image in a shrine."

There was some beginnings of a titter and Dormer was conscious that he was blushing violently. But Colonel Lepage quelled the others

with a look. He had the matter so well in hand that Dormer began slowly to feel that he must be one of those political soldiers, whose every act and speech is dictated by the necessities of some policy, hatched high up among Foreign Offices and their ante-rooms, and worked out in detail by underlings dealing with underlings. Moreover, Dormer was perfectly conscious that he was a junior officer and therefore a splendid target. Colonel Lepage would not meet him that evening at Mess. He resigned himself, and the Colonel drew a long breath, and let himself go.

"Upon my word, it is all very fine for you others. We are much obliged for the information as to the meaning of the word *Vierge*. And also for being told that no arrest has been made and that no compensation has been offered. Unfortunately the matter has gone a good deal further than you suppose, and we have to furnish a report to a higher authority, to the French War Office in fact. The matter is a most serious one. The claim is for trespass upon private property not demarcated for billeting under the law of 1873. You follow?"

Dormer held his peace. With the exception of the word demarcated, the Colonel's English

was as good as his own and many times more voluble. He contented himself with thinking "Cock—cock—cock—cock pheasant!"

"Then there is the actual damage to the fabric. You may not be aware that such an object is held in great veneration by the owners, more particularly in Flanders where they are very devout. But the most serious thing of all was the treatment accorded to the Mayor when he was—with the most perfect legality—called in by the claimant to take official note of the damage. This functionary was grossly insulted by the English troops and I regret to say that these occurrences are far too frequent. Only last Easter at Bertezeele, the procession of the Religious Festival was the object of laughter of the troops, who may not be aware that the inhabitants attach great importance to such matters, but who should be so instructed by their officers. And at Leders-cappell only last week, the Mayor of that Commune also was insulted in the middle of his official duties. These incidents are very regrettable and must be checked. Therefore I regret to say that your explanation is valueless. Perhaps you will be so good as to convey this to your General?"

Dormer had a feeling that whatever he said

would make no earthly difference, so he merely muttered:

"Very good, sir," and turned on his heel.

Walking their horses down the hill from Flan, Dendrecourt said:

"My word, he was in a state of mind, wasn't he? our Colonel."

Dormer had the clearest possible presentiment that the moment the door closed upon them, the Colonel had said 'Pan' in imitation of a cork being snapped into a bottle, and that all the rest of the officers had laughed. So he said:

"What on earth is behind all this, Dendrecourt?"

"Why, nothing, except the dignity of France."

"The whole job is only worth a pound or two. I'd have paid it out of my own pocket rather than have all this about it."

"Well, of course, you may have enough money to do it, but, my dear Dormer, a few pounds in England is a good many francs in France, not only in exchange value, but in sentiment. Then, no one likes having his grandmother's tomb broken into——"

"I suppose they will get over it, if they are paid enough money," rejoined Dormer, bitterly,

for it was exactly what he had heard before.

"Certainly!" replied Dendrecourt, without noticing, "but it is most unfortunate at this moment. There is a religious revival in France. A new Commander-in-Chief and a new spirit, and these insults to the religious sentiment are very trying. Then there is the insult to the Mayor."

"Oh, devil take the Mayor!"

The Frenchman shrugged. "The devil has taken all of us, my friend. We are a sacrificed generation. You find the Mayor of Hondebecq annoying. So do I. But not more than everything else. You would not like it if French soldiers laughed at an English Mayor!"

"My dear Dendrecourt, in England a Mayor is somebody. Not an old peasant dressed up in a top hat and an apron, all stars and stripes."

"Well, here is lunch!" (He called it lernch.) "I will not join with you, Dormer, in the game of slanging each other's nationality."

Dormer dismounted and handed over his horse, and went in to lunch, walking wide in the legs and feeling a fool. The only pleasure he had had was the male-game-bird appearance of Colonel Lepage.

Of course he said nothing about his morning's work, and of course Colonel Birchin had forgotten

it. At the end of the week the Division moved into the line and he had to go forward with that fellow Kavanagh to check the workings of communications. They were "in" four weeks, and came out in the great cold of January, 1917, and were moved up near to Doullens. They had not been out a week before the Colonel sent for him. He knew what it would be about, but the whole of his mind being occupied with keeping warm, he did not care. They were in huts, on a high plateau. White snow obliterated every colour, softened every outline as far as the eye could reach, except where the road to Arras lay black with its solid ice, the snow that the traffic had trodden into water, refrozen into a long black band, scattered with cinders, gravel, chalk, anything that made it negotiable.

Dormer looked at the collection of huts, with the obvious pathways between, the obvious, inevitable collection of traffic, lorries and limbers, motor-cycles and horses that accumulated round any Head-quarters. He wondered how long it would take the Bosche to discover it in some air-photo and bomb it all to blazes. Inside Q. office, in spite of two big stoves in the tiny box of a place, it was so cold that every one breathed

clouds of steam, and the three officers, and the clerks, sat in their coats.

"Look here, Dormer!"—the Colonel sounded as though he had a personal grievance—"just look what I've got from the army."

It was an official memorandum, emanating from Army Head-quarters and duly passed through the Corps to whom they had belonged, and by Corps to the Division, inquiring what results had been arrived at in the Vanderlynden affair, and whether it could not be reported to the Minister of War that the matter had reached a satisfactory conclusion.

"I thought you settled all that, while we were at Louches?"

"Well, sir, I went to see them at Army Head-quarters and explained, or tried to."

"You don't seem to have done any good at all. In fact it looks as though you and Dendrecourt had a nice morning ride for nothing."

"I couldn't get a word in. It suited somebody's politics to blackguard us just then, and I left it at that. It didn't seem any use arguing, sir."

"Well, this must be stopped somehow. We shall have the French War Minister taking the

matter up with Whitehall, directly, and a nice figure we shall all cut. I've known men sent to Salonika or Mespot, as company commanders, for less than this."

"Very good, sir. What shall I do?"

"Get on with it. Find out who did the beastly damage, and straf him. Straf somebody, anyhow, and bring the remains here in a bag. We can show it to Corps, and they can write a sermon on the efficiency of the Adjutant-General's Department."

"Yessir. If you refer to the correspondence you will see that the name of the unit is mentioned."

Dormer stood perfectly still, while his superior officer turned over the closely written, printed or typed sheets. His face was carefully veiled in official blankness. He had an idea.

"Well, here you are," the Colonel was saying, "469 Trench Mortar Battery. You'll have to go and see 'em. You ought to have done so long before!"

Dormer could not help adding, maliciously:

"Wouldn't it be sufficient if I were to send 'em a chit, sir?"

"No, it wouldn't. We've had quite enough of

this procrastination. It'll land us all in a nice hole, if we're not careful. You go and see them and insist on getting to the bottom of it."

"Yes, sir. The order of battle will give their position."

"I'll see to that. I'll have it looked up and let you know in the morning."

"Yes, sir." He went back to his hut, delighted.

Escape. Escape. Even the illusion of escape for a few hours, it must be at least that, for if the 469 Trench Mortar Battery were in the same Division, the same Corps even, he would have heard of them. They must be at least a day's journey away, and he would be able to get away from the blasting and withering boredom for at least that. Colonel Birchin, a regular, who had been on various Staff appointments since the very early days, had no conception how personnel changed and units shifted, and unless he (Dormer) were very much mistaken, it would be a jolly old hunt. So much the better. He would have his mind off the War for a bit.

The reply came from Corps that, according to the order of battle, 469 Trench Mortar Battery was not in existence, but try Trench Mortar

School at Bertezeele. It was all one to Dormer. He might simply be exchanging one cold hut for another, he might travel by rail and lorry instead of on horse or foot. But at any rate it would be a different hut that he was cold in and a different mode of conveyance that jolted him, and that was something, one must not be too particular in war-time. So he jumped on a lorry that took him into Doullens and at Doullens he took train and went through Abbeville and the endless dumps and camps by the sea, up to Étaples, where the dumps and camps, the enormous reinforcement depôts and mile-long hospitals stretched beside the line almost into Boulogne, where was a little pocket, as it were, of French civilian life, going on undisturbed amid the general swamping of French by English, on that coast, and of civilian life by military. Here he got a meal and changed and went off again up the hill, past Marquise, and down a long hill to Calais, in the dark, and then on, in the flat, where the country smelled different from the Somme, and where the people spoke differently and the names of the stations sounded English, and where there were French and Belgian police on the platforms.

He slept and woke at St. Omer, and slept again

and woke to find all the lights out and a general scurry and scatteration, with the drone of aeroplanes and the continual pop-popping of anti-aircraft fire. Then came the shrieking whirr and sharp crash of the first bomb, with its echo of tinkling glass, barking of dogs, and rumour of frightened humanity.

Like most people accustomed to the line, Dormer regarded the bombing of back billets as a spectacle rather than as one of the serious parts of warfare, and got out to stroll about the platform with officers going up as reinforcements. They exchanged cigarettes and news and hardly stopped to laugh at the horrified whisper of the R.T.O., "Don't light matches here!" It was soon over, like all bombing. If you were hit you were hit, but if you weren't hit in the first minute or two, you wouldn't be, because no plane could stay circling up there for very long, and the bomber was always more frightened than you were. Then the train moved on, and Dormer could feel on each side of him again the real camp life of units just behind the line, mule standings, gun parks, and tents and huts of infantry, and services. It was midnight before he got out at Bailleul. He had left the camp on the Arras

road in the morning, had made a great loop on the map and reached a railhead as near the line as he had been twenty-four hours before. He stumbled up the stony street to the Officers' Rest House, drank some cocoa out of a mug and fell asleep, his head on his valise.

In the morning he got a lift out to Bertezeele, and found the Trench Mortar School. He reflected that it would really be more correct to say that he took a lift to the Trench Mortar School, and incidentally touched the village of Bertezeele. For the fact was that the English population of the parish exceeded the French native one. Men of all sorts and conditions from every unit known to the Army List (and a good many that had never graced the pages of that swollen periodical) were drawn into this new device for improved killing. Dormer himself, one of those who, since the elementary home camp training of 1915, had been in or just behind the trenches, wondered at the complicated ramifications with which the War was running. Apparently those curious little brass instruments, the bane of his life as an infantry platoon commander, which used to come up behind his line and there, while totally ineffective in the vital matter

of beating the Germans, were just sufficiently annoying to make those methodical enemies take great pains to rob him of his food and sleep for many ensuing days, were all done away with.

Stokes, whoever he was, but he was certainly a genius, had affected a revolution. Owing to him, neat tubes, like enlarged pencil-guards, with a nail inside the blind end, upon which the cap-end of the cartridge automatically fell, were being used, as a hosier might say, in all sizes from youth's to large men's. Stokes was branded with genius, because his invention combined the two essentials—simplicity with certainty. He had brought the blunderbuss up to date.

What else were these short-range, muzzle-loading, old-iron scattering devices? Just blunderbusses. History was not merely repeating itself. As the War went on it was moving backwards. Tin helmets of the days of Cromwell, bludgeons such as Cœur de Lion used upon Saladin, and for mere modernity, grenades like the original British Grenadiers of the song. He had never had any head for poetry, but he could remember some of the stuff Kavanagh had sung in the dug-out. Not tow-row-row. That was the chorus. Ah! he remembered.

"Our leaders march with fusees,
And we with hand-grenades,
We throw them from the glacis
About the enemy's ears.
With a tow-row-row," etc.

Well, now we didn't. If we had grenades we carried them in aprons, like a market woman, with a skirt full of apples. And if we had a blunderbuss, like the guard of the coach in the "Pickwick Papers," we kept it, and all the ironmongery that belonged to it, on a hand-barrow, and pushed it in front of us like fish-hawkers on a Saturday night. What a War! Kavanagh was quite right of course. There was neither decency nor dignity left in it. Wouldn't do to admit that though! And putting on his very best "Good-mornin'-Sah- I- have- been- sent- by- Divisional- Headquarters" expression, he asked his way to the "office" as they were beginning to call the orderly room in most detachments, and inquired for 469 Battery. Yes. They were to be seen. Orderly room, as a Corps formation, was distant and slightly patronizing, but the information was correct. He could see the Officer commanding the battery. Certainly he could, as soon as morning practice was over. That would do.

He made himself as inconspicuous as possible until he saw the various parties being "fallen in" on the range, and heard the uncanny ear-tickling silence that succeeded the ceaseless pop-pop of practice and then drifted casually into the wooden-chair-and-table furnished ante-room, where the month-old English magazines gave one a tremulous home-sickness, and men who had been mildly occupied all the morning were drinking all the vermouth or whisky they could, in the fear of being bored to the point of mutiny in the afternoon.

There was, of course, the usual springtime curiosity as to what the year might bring forth, for every one always hoped against hope that the next offensive would really be the last. An orderly wandering among the tables appeared to be looking for him, and he found himself summoned before the Officer commanding the School.

Although his appointment was new, Colonel Burgess was of the oldest type of soldier, the sort who tell the other fellows how to do it. The particular sort of war in which he found himself suited him exactly. He had the true Indian view of life, drill, breakfast, less drill, lunch, siesta, sport, dinner, cards. So he ruled the mess cook

with a rod of iron, took disciplinary action if the stones that lined the path leading to the door of the ante-room and office were not properly white, and left the technical side of the business to Sergeant-instructors who, having recently escaped from the trenches, were really keen on it.

He received Dormer with that mixture of flattery due to anyone from Divisional Headquarters and suspicion naturally aroused as to what he (Dormer) might be after. He was annoyed that he had not heard of Dormer's arrival, and hastened to add:

"Not a very full parade this morning, units come and go, y'know. We can never be quite sure what we are going to get! What did you think of our show?"

Dormer realized that the old gentleman was under the impression he was being spied on:

"I really didn't notice, sir. I have been sent to see the Officer commanding 469 Trench Mortar Battery. Matter of discipline arising out of a claim for compensation."

"Oh, ah! Yes indeed. Certainly. See him now. Sergeant Innes!"

The efficient Scotch Sergeant to be found in all such places appeared from the outer office.

"Have we anyone here from 469 T.M.B.?"

The officer required was duly produced, and the Colonel retired to the Mess, leaving them together. Dormer sized up this fellow with whom he was thus brought into momentary contact. This became by necessity almost a fine art, during years of war. Dormer was fairly proficient. The fellow opposite to him was of the same sort as himself. Probably in insurance or stock-broking, not quite the examination look of the Civil Service, not the dead certainty of banking. He had obviously enlisted, been gradually squeezed up to the point of a Commission, had had his months in the line and had taken to Trench Mortars because they offered the feeling of really doing something, together with slightly improved conditions (hand-carts could be made to hold more food, drink and blankets than mere packs) and was getting along as well as he could. He heard what Dormer wanted and his face cleared.

"Why, that's last April. I couldn't tell you anything about that. I was in Egypt!"

"You don't know of any officer in your unit who could give some information about the occurrence?"

"No. There's only young Sands, beside myself. He couldn't have been there."

"Some N.C.O. then?"

"Heavens, man, where d'you think we've been? All the N.C.O.s are new since I was with the crowd!"

"But surely there must be some record of men who were with your unit?"

"Well, of course, the pay rolls go back to Base somewhere. But I suppose you can pick the name and number up from the conduct sheet."

"You see, I don't know the man's name. His number was given as 6494."

"That's a joke, of course. It's the number that the cooks sing out, when we hold the last Sick Parade, before going up the line."

"Of course it is. You're right. I ought to have remembered that, but I've been away from my regiment for some time." Dormer pondered a moment, relieved. Then the thought of going back to the Q. office with nothing settled, and the queries of the French Mission and the whole beastly affair hanging over his head, drove him on again. He made his air a little heavier, more Divisional, less friendly.

"Well, I'm afraid this won't do, you know. This matter had got to be cleared up. It will be very awkward if I have to go back and inform Head-quarters that you can't furnish any information. It fact, they will probably think it's a case of not wanting to know, and make a regular Court of Inquiry of it."

He watched the face of the other, and saw in a moment how well he had calculated. The fellow was frightened. A mere unit commander, and a small unit at that! To such a one, of course, Divisional Head-quarters were something pretty near omniscient, certainly omnipotent. Dormer watched the fellow shift in the chair without a qualm. Let some one else be worried too. He himself had had worry enough. The face before him darkened, smirked deferentially, and then brightened.

"Oh, there was old Chirnside. He might know."

"Who was he?"

"Chirnside? He was a sort of a quarter bloke. It was before we were properly formed, and he used to look after all our stores and orderly room business. He had been with the battery since

its formation. We were just anybody, got together anyhow, chiefly from the infantry, you remember?"

Dormer saw the other glance at his shoulder straps and just refrain from calling him sir, poor wretch. He took down the information and thanked his friend. Chirnside had apparently gone to some stunt Corps, to do something about equipment. That was all right. He wouldn't be killed.

Having got thus far, Dormer felt that he had done a good deal, and went to take his leave of Colonel Burgess. But he soon found that he was not to be allowed to get away like that. He was bidden to stay to lunch. There was no train from Bailleul until the evening and he was willing enough. The lunch was good. Food remained one of the things in which one could take an interest. He did so. After lunch the Colonel took him for a walk over the golf course. This was the margin of land around the range, on which no cultivation was allowed, and from which civilians were rigidly excluded, for safety's sake. At least during range practice, which took place every day more or less, in the morning. After that, of course, they could be without difficulty

excluded for the remainder of the day for a different, if not for so laudable a purpose.

The Colonel was a fine example of those qualities which have made an island Empire what it is. Having spent most of his life from sixteen years old at Sandhurst, then in India or Egypt, and finally at Eastbourne, he knew better than most men how to impose those institutions which he and his sort considered the only ones that made civilization possible, in the most unlikely places and upon the most disinclined of people. Dormer had seen it being done before, but marvelled more and more. Just as the Colonel, backed of course by a sufficient number of his like, and the right sort of faithful underling, had introduced tennis into India, duck-shooting into Egypt, and exclusiveness into Eastbourne, against every condition of climate or geographical position, native religion or custom, so now he had introduced golf into Flanders, and that in the height of a European War.

At the topmost point of the golf course, the Colonel stopped, and began to point out the beauties of the spot to Dormer. They were standing on one of those low gravelly hills that separate the valley of the Yser from that of the

Lys. Northward, beyond Poperinghe, was a yet lower and greener ridge that shelved away out of sight toward Dunkirk. East lay Ypres, in an endless rumour of war. Southward, the Spanish towers of Bailleul showed where the road wound towards Lille, by Armentières. Westward, Cassel rose above those hillocks and plains, among the most fertile in the world. But the Colonel was most concerned with a big square old farmhouse, that lay amid its barns and meadows, at a crook in the Bailleul road.

The Colonel's eyes took on a brighter blue and his moustache puffed out like fine white smoke.

"I had a lot of trouble with that fellow." He pointed to the farm. "Wanted to come and cultivate the range. I had to get an interpreter to see him. Said he could grow—er—vegetables in between the shell-holes. At last we had to order afternoon practice to keep him off. Then he wanted this part of the land. Had to move the guns up and make some new bunkers. Four rounds makes a bunker, y'know. Come and have tea?"

It was very nice weather for walking, dry and clear. The Mess had seemed tolerable at lunch,

but Dormer had not been long at tea before he recollected what he seldom forgot for more than an hour or so, that it was not tea, one of the fixed occasions of his safe and comfortable life. It was a meal taken under all the exigencies of a campaign—chlorinated water, condensed milk, army chair, boots and puttees on one, and in this particular afternoon a temperature below zero, in an army hut.

The Colonel, of course, occupied the place of warmth next the stove. The remainder of the Mess got as near to it as they could. The result was, that when the Colonel began to question him as to the object of his visit, and how he had progressed towards attaining it, everybody necessarily heard the whole of the conversation. He now realized that he was telling the tale for the fourth time. He had told it to Kavanagh, then to Colonel Birchin. Now he had told it to the Officer commanding 469 T.M.B. and finally here he was going over it again. He resented it as a mere nuisance, but was far from seeing at that moment the true implication of what he was doing. The matter was not a State secret. It was an ordinary piece of routine discipline,

slightly swollen by its reactions in the French Mission, and by the enormous size and length of the War.

If he had refused to say why he was there the Colonel would certainly have put him down as having been sent by the Division, or some one even higher, to spy on the activities of the School. He didn't want to be labelled as that, so told what he knew glibly enough. The Colonel waxed very voluble over it, gave good advice that was no earthly use, and dwelt at length on various aspects of the case. The French were grasping and difficult and superstitious, but on the other hand, drivers were a rough lot and must be kept in check. They were always doing damage. The fellow was quite right of course to look after his mules. The animals were in a shocking state, etc., etc., but quite wrong, of course, to damage civilian property, tradition of the British Army, since Wellington all the other way, the French naturally expected proper treatment, etc., etc.

Dormer had heard it all before, from Colonel Birchin, Major Stevenage and others, with exactly the same well-meant condescension, and the same grotesque ineffectiveness. This old Colonel, like

all his sort, couldn't solve the difficulty nor shut the French up, nor appease G.H.Q.

Presently, the old man went off to the orderly room to sign the day's correspondence, the Mess thinned and Dormer dozed discreetly, he had had a poor night and was desperately sleepy. Some one came to wake him up and offered him a wash, and he was glad to move, stiff with cold, and only anxious to pass the time until he could get the midnight train from Bailleul. They were very hospitable, made much of him at dinner, and he ate and drank all he could get, being ravenous and hoping to sleep through the discomforts of the long train journey in the dark. He was getting fairly cheerful by the time the Colonel left the hut, and only became conscious, in the intervals of a learned and interesting discussion of the relative theories of wire-cutting, that a "rag" was in progress at the other end of the room.

A gunner officer, a young and happy boy who was still in the stage of thinking the War the greatest fun out, was holding a mock Court of Inquiry. Gradually the "rag" got the better of the argument and Dormer found himself being addressed as "Gentlemen of the jury." A target

frame was brought in by some one to act as a witness-box, but the gunner genius who presided soon had it erected into a sort of Punch and Judy Proscenium. Then only did it dawn on Dormer that the play was not Punch and Judy. It was the Mayor of Hondebecq being derided by the troops, with a Scotch officer in a kilt impersonating Madeleine Vanderlynden, and receiving with the greatest equanimity, various suggestions that ranged from the feebly funny to the strongly obscene. O.C. 469 T.M.B. found a willing column formed behind him which he had to lead round the table, an infantryman brought a wastepaper basket to make the Mayor's top hat, and in the midst of other improvisations, Dormer discovered the gunner standing in front of him with a mock salute.

"Do you mind coming out of the Jury and taking your proper part?"

It was cheek, of course, but Dormer was not wearing red tabs, and beside, what was the use of standing on one's dignity. He asked:

"What part do I play?"

"You're Jack Ketch. You come on in the fourth Act, and land Nobby one on the nob!"

"I see. What are you?"

"Me? I'm the Devil. Watch me devilling," and with a long map-roller he caught the players in turn resounding cracks upon their several heads. They turned on him with common consent, and in the resulting struggle, the table broke and subsided with the whole company in an ignominious mass. The dust rose between the grey canvas-covered walls and the tin suspension lamp rocked like that of a ship at sea. Everybody picked themselves up, slightly sobered, and began to discuss how to get the damage repaired before the Colonel saw it in the morning.

O.C. 469 T.M.B. stood at Dormer's elbow:

"We've just got time to catch your train."

"Come on." Dormer had no intention of being marooned in this place another day. Outside a cycle and side-car stood panting. Dormer did wonder as they whizzed down the rutted road how long such a vehicle had been upon the strength of a Trench Mortar School, but after all. could you blame fellows? They were existing under War conditions, what more could one ask?

*   *   *

He woke to the slow jolting of the train as it slowed up in smoky twilight at Boulogne. He

bought some food, and sitting with it in his hands and his thermos between his knees, he watched the grey Picard day strengthen over those endless camps and hospitals, dumps and training grounds.

He was retracing his steps of the day before, but he was a step farther on. As he looked at the hundreds of thousands of Khaki-clad figures, he realized something of what he had to do. With no name or number he had to find one of them, who could be proved to have been at a certain place a year ago. He didn't want to, but if he didn't, would he ever get rid of the business?

The "rag" of the previous evening stuck in his head. How true it was. The man who did the thing was "Nobby" with the number 6494 that was beginning to be folk-lore. Of course he was. He was any or every soldier. Madeleine Vanderlynden was the heroine. O.C. 469 T.M.B. was the hero. The Mayor of Hondebecq was the comic relief, and he, Dormer, was the villain. He was indeed Jack Ketch, the spoiler of the fun, the impotent figure-head of detested "Justice," or "Law and Order." And finally, as in all properly conducted Punch and

Judy shows, the Devil came and took the lot. What had Dendrecourt said: "The Devil had taken the whole generation." Well, it was all in the play. And when he realized this, as he slid on from Étaples down to Abbeville, he began to feel it was not he who was pursuing some unknown soldier in all that nation-in-arms that had grown from the British Expeditionary Force, but the Army—no, the War—that was pursuing him.

When he got out at Doullens, and scrounged a lift from a passing car, he found himself looking at the driver, at the endless transport on either side of the road, at the sentry on guard over the parked heavies in the yard of the jam factory, at the military policeman at the cross-roads. One or other of all these hundreds of thousands knew all about the beastly business that was engaging more and more of his mind. One or other of them could point to the man who was wanted.

He found himself furtively examining their faces, prepared for covert ridicule and suspicion, open ignorance or stupidity. He had, by now, travelled a long way from the first feelings he had about the affair, when he had thought of the perpetrator of the damage at Vanderlynden's

as a poor devil to be screened if possible. He wouldn't screen him now. This was the effect of the new possibility that had arisen. He, Dormer, did not intend to be ridiculous.

On reaching the Head-quarters of the Division, he found the War in full progress. That is to say, every one was standing about, waiting to do something. Dormer had long discovered that this was war. Enlisting as he had done at the outbreak of hostilities, with no actual experience of what such a set of conditions could possibly be like, he had then assumed that he was in for a brief and bitter period of physical discomfort and danger, culminating quite possibly in death, but quite certainly in a decisive victory for the Allies within a few months. He had graduated in long pedestrian progress of Home Training, always expecting it to cease one fine morning. It did. He and others were ordered to France. With incredible slowness and difficulty they found the battalion to which they were posted. Now for it, he had thought, and soon found himself involved in a routine, dirtier and more dangerous, but as unmistakably a routine as that in which he had been involved at home.

He actually distinguished himself at it, by his

thoroughness and care, and came to be the person to whom jobs were given! Thus had he eventually, after a twelvemonth, found another false end to the endless waiting. He was sent to help the Q. office of Divisional Staff. He had felt himself to be of considerable importance, a person who really was winning the War. But in a few weeks he was as disabused as ever. It was only the same thing. Clerking in uniform, with no definite hours, a few privileges of food and housing, but no nearer sight of the end of it. The Somme had found him bitterly disillusioned. And yet even now, after being two days away from the Head-quarters where his lot was cast, he was dumfounded afresh to find everything going on just as he had left it.

They were all waiting now for orders to go into a back area and be trained. For, as sure as the snowdrop appeared, there sprang up in the hearts of men a pathetic eternal hopefulness. Perhaps nothing more than a vernal effusion, yet there it was, and as Dormer reported to Colonel Birchin, in came the messenger they had all been expecting, ordering them, not forward into the line, but backward to Authun, for training. It was some time before he could get attention, and

when he did, it seemed both to him and to the Colonel that the affair had lessened in importance.

"You've asked 3rd Eccleton to give you the posting of this Chirnside?"

"Yessir!"

"Very well. That's all you can do for the moment. Now I want you to see that everything is cleared up in the three Infantry Brigade camps, and don't let us have the sort of chits afterwards that we got at Lumbres, etc."

So the Vanderlynden affair receded into the background, and Dormer found before his eyes once more that everlasting mud-coloured procession, men, men, limbers, cookers, men, lorries, guns, limbers, men.

He looked at it this time with different eyes. His Division was one-fiftieth part of the British Army in France. It took over a day to get on the move, it occupied miles of road, absorbed train-loads of supplies, and would take two days to go thirty miles. The whole affair was so huge, that the individual man was reduced and reduced in importance until he went clean out of sight. This fellow he was pursuing, or Chirnside, or anyone who could have given any useful information about the Vanderlynden claim, might be in

any one of those cigarette-smoking, slow-moving columns, on any of those springless vehicles, or beside any of those mules.

He gazed at the faces of the men as they streamed past him, every county badge on their caps, every dialect known to England on their lips, probably the best natured and easiest to manage of any of the dozen or so national armies engaged in the War. He was realizing deeply the difficulty of discovering that particular "Nobby" who had broken the front of the shrine at Vanderlynden's. It was just the thing any of them would do. How many times had he noticed their curious tenderness for uncouth animals, stray dogs or cats, even moles or hedgehogs, and above all the brazen, malevolent army mule. He was no fancier of any sort of beast, and the mule as used in France he had long realized to have two virtues and two only—cheapness and durability. You couldn't kill them, but if you did, it was easy to get more. He had been, for a long while now, a harassed officer, busy shifting quantities of war material, human, animal, or inanimate, from one place to another, and had come to regard mules as so much movable war stores. Added to the fact that he was no

fancier, this had prevented him from feeling any affection for the motive power of first-line transport. But he was conscious enough that it was not so with the men—the "other ranks" as they were denominated in all those innumerable parade states and nominal rolls with which he spent his days in dealing.

No, what the fellow had done was what most drivers would do. That queer feeling about animals was the primary cause of the whole affair. Then, balancing it, was the natural carelessness about such an object as a shrine—this same brown-clothed nation that defiled before him, he knew them well. As a churchwarden, he knew that not ten per cent of them went inside a place of worship more than three or four times in the whole of their lives. Baptism for some, marriage for a good proportion, an occasional assistance at the first or last rite of some relative, finally, the cemetery chapel, that was the extent of their church-going.

A small number, chiefly from the north or from Ireland, might be Catholics, but also from the north of Ireland was an equal number of violent anti-Catholics, and it was to this latter section that he judged the perpetrator of the outrage to

belong. No, they would see nothing, or at best something to despise, in that little memorial altar, hardly more than an enlarged tombstone, in the corner of a Flemish pasture. It was strange if not detestable, it was foreign; they never saw their own gravestones, seldom those of any relative. He sympathized with them in that ultra-English sentimentality, that cannot bear to admit frankly the frail briefness of human life. And so the thing had happened, any of them might have done it, most of them would do it, under similar circumstances.

The tail of the last column wound out of B camp, the N.C.O. he took with him on these occasions was reporting all clear, and might he hand over to the advance party of the incoming Division. Dormer gave him exact orders as to what to hand over and obtain a signature for, and where to find him next, for he did not believe in allowing an N.C.O. any scope for imagination, if by any possibility such a faculty might have survived in him.

The weather had broken, and he jogged along in the mud to C camp and found it already vacated, but no advance party ready to take over, and resigned himself to the usual wait. He

waited and he waited. Of course, he wasn't absolutely forced to do so. He might have left his N.C.O. and party to hand over. He might have cleared them off and left the incoming Division to shift for itself. That had been done many a time in his experience. How often, as a platoon commander, had he marched and marched, glancing over his shoulder at tired men only too ready to drop out, marched and marched until at length by map square and horse sense, and general oh-let's-get-in-here-and-keep-any-one-else-out, he found such a camp, a few tents subsiding in the mud, a desolate hut or two, abandoned and unswept, places which disgusted him more than any mere trench or dug-out, because they were places that people had lived in and left unclean.

He had never experienced such a thing before he came into the army. His nice middle-class upbringing had never allowed him to suspect that such places existed. And now that he was Captain Dormer, attached H.Q. Nth Division, he endeavoured to see that they did not. So he hung about intending to see the thing done properly. He got no encouragement. He knew that when he got back to the Division Colonel

Birchin would simply find him something else to do, and the fact that no complaints followed them, and that the incoming Division had a better time than they would otherwise have had, would be swallowed up in the hasty expedience of the War. Still, he did it, because he liked to feel that the job was being properly done. To this he had been brought up, and he was not going to change in war-time

As he hung about the empty hut, he had plenty of time for reflection. His feet were cold. When would he get leave? What a nuisance if these d——d people who were relieving him didn't turn up until it was dark. The February day was waning. Ah, here they were. He roused himself from the despondent quiescence of a moment ago, into a crisp authoritative person from Divisional Head-quarters. Never was a camp handed over more promptly. He let his N.C.O. and men rattle off in the limber they had provided themselves with. He waited for a car. There was bound to be no difficulty in getting a lift into Doullens, and if he did not find one immediately there, he would soon get a railway voucher. As he stood in the gathering dusk his ruminations went on. If it were not

for the War, he would be going home to tea, real proper tea, no chlorine in the water, milk out of a cow, not out of a tin, tea-cakes, some small savoury if he fancied it, his sister with whom he lived believing in the doctrine: "Feed the beast!" After that, he would have the choice of the Choral Society or generally some lecture or other. At times there was something on at the local theatre, at others he had Vestry or Trust meetings to attend. Such employments made a fitting termination to a day which he had always felt to be well filled at a good, safe, and continuous job, that would go on until he reached a certain age, when it culminated in a pension, a job that was worth doing, that he could do, and that the public appreciated.

Instead of all this, here he was, standing beside a desolate Picard highway, hoping that he might find his allotted hut in time to wash in a canvas bucket, eat at a trestle table and finally, having taken as much whisky as would wash down the food, and help him to become superior to his immediate circumstances, to play bridge with those other people whom he was polite to, because he had to be, but towards whom he felt no great inclination, and whom he would

drop without a sigh the moment he was demobbed.

Ah! Here was the sort of car. He stepped into the road and held up his hand. The car stopped with a crunch and a splutter. They were going as far a Bernaville. That would suit him well. He jammed into the back seat between two other people. mackintoshed and goggled, and the car got under way again. Then he made the usual remark and answered the usual inquiries, taking care to admit nothing, and to let his Divisional weight be felt. Finally he got down at a place where he could get a lorry lift to H.Q.

His servant had laid out some clean clothes in the Armstrong hut. For that he was thankful.

* * *

The Division now proceeded to train for the coming offensive. "Cultivators" had been warned off a large tract of land, which was partly devoted to "Schools," at which were taught various superlative methods of slaughter, partly to full-dress manœuvres over country which resembled in physical features the portion of the German line to be attacked. The natural result was that if any area larger than a tennis court

was left vacant, the "cultivators" rushed back and began to cultivate it. Hence arose disputes between the peasants and the troops, and the General commanding the 556 Brigade had his bridle seized by an infuriated female who wanted to know, in English, why he couldn't keep off her beans.

The matter was reported to G. office of Divisional Head-quarters, who told the A. P. M., who told the French Liaison Officer, who told an Interpreter, who told the "cultivators" to keep off the ground altogether, whether it were in use or not. In revenge for which conduct the "cultivators" fetched the nearest gendarme, and had the Interpreter arrested as a spy, and tilled the land so that the C.R.A. Corps couldn't find the dummy trenches he was supposed to have been bombarding, because they had all been filled up and planted. So that he reported the matter to Corps, who sat heavily on Divisional Head-quarters, G. office, for not keeping the ground clear. The A.P.M. and French Mission having been tried and failed, Q. office had the brilliant idea of "lending" Dormer to G., upon the well-tried army principle that a man does a job, not

because he is fit, but because he is not required elsewhere.

So Dormer patrolled the manœuvre area, mounted on the horses of senior officers, who were too busy to ride them. He did not object. It kept him from thinking. He was, by now, well acquainted with manœuvre areas, from near Dunkirk to below Amiens. It was the same old tale. First the various schools. The Bombing Instructor began with a short speech:

"It is now generally admitted that the hand-grenade is the weapon with which you are going to win this War!"

The following day in the bayonet-fighting pitch, the instructor in that arm began:

"This is the most historic weapon in the hands of the British Army. It still remains the decisive factor on the field!"

And the day following, on the range, the Musketry expert informed the squad:

"Statistics show that the largest proportion of the casualties inflicted on the enemy, are bullet wounds."

Dormer was not unkind enough to interrupt. He did not blame those instructors. Having, by

desperately hard work, obtained their positions, they were naturally anxious to keep them. But his new insight and preoccupation, born of the Vanderlynden affair, made him study the faces of the listening squads intently. No psychologist, he could make nothing of them. Blank, utterly bored in the main, here and there he caught sight of one horrified, or one peculiarly vindictive. The main impression he received was of the sheer number of those passive listening faces, compared with the fewness of the N.C.O.s and instructors. So long as they were quiescent, all very well. But if that dormant mass came to life, some day, if that immense immobility once moved, got under way, where would it stop?

It was the same with the full-dress manœuvres. Dormer had never been taken up with the honour and glory of war. He was going through with this soldiering, which had been rather thrust upon him, for the plain reason that he wanted to get to the end of it. He considered that he had contracted to defeat the Germans just as, if he had been an iron firm, he might have contracted to make girders, or if he had been the Post Office, he would have contracted to deliver letters. And now that he watched the final processes of the

job, he became more than ever aware that the goods would not be up to sample. How could they be? Here were men being taught to attack, with the principal condition of attack wanting. The principal condition of an attack was that the other fellow hit back as hard as he could. Here there was no one hitting you back. He wondered if all these silent and extraordinarily docile human beings in the ranks would see that some day. He looked keenly at their faces. Mask, mask; mule-like stupidity, too simple to need a mask; mask and mask again; one with blank horror written on it, one with a devilish lurking cunning, as if there might be something to be made out of all this some day; then more masks.

He wondered, but he did not wonder too unhappily. He was beginning to feel very well. Away from the line, the hours were more regular, the food somewhat better, the horse exercise did him good. There was another reason which Dormer, no reader of poetry, failed altogether to appreciate. Spring had come. Furtive and slow, the Spring of the shores of the grey North Sea, came stealing across those hard-featured downs and rich valleys. Tree and bush, black-

ened and wind-bitten, were suddenly visited with a slender effusion of green, almost transparent, looking stiff and ill-assorted, as though Nature were experimenting.

Along all those ways where men marched to slaughter, the magic footsteps preceded them, as though they had been engaged in some beneficent work, or some joyful festival. To Dormer the moment was poignant but for other reasons. It was the moment when the culminating point of the Football Season marked the impending truce in that game. He did not play cricket. It was too expensive and too slow. In summer he sailed a small boat on his native waters. Instead, he was going to be involved in another offensive.

The Division left the manœuvre area and went up through Arras. Of course, the weather broke on the very eve of the "show." That had become almost a matter of routine, like the shelling, the stupendous activities of railways and aeroplanes, the everlasting telephoning. Again Dormer saw going past him endlessly, that stream of men and mules, mules and men, sandwiched in between every conceivable vehicle, from tanks to stretchers. When, after what communiqués described as "continued progress" and "consider-

able artillery activity," it had to be admitted that this offensive, like all other offensives, had come to a dead stop, Dormer was not astonished. For one thing, he knew, what no communiqué told, what had stopped it. The Germans? No, capable and determined as they were. The thing which stopped it was Mud. Nothing else. The shell-fire had been so perfect, that the equally perfect and necessarily complicated preparations for going a few hundred yards farther, could not be made. The first advance was miles. The next hundreds of yards. The next a hundred yards.

Then the Bosche got some back. Then everything had to be moved up to make quite certain of advancing miles again. And it couldn't be done. There was no longer sufficient firm ground to bear the tons of iron that alone could help frail humanity to surmount such efforts.

For another thing, he could not be astonished. For weeks he worked eighteen hours a day, ate what he could, slept when he couldn't help it. Astonishment was no longer in him. But one bit of his mind remained, untrammelled by the great machine of which he formed an insignificant part. It was a bit of subconsciousness that was always

listening for something, just as, under long-range, heavy-calibre bombardment, one listened and listened for the next shell. But the particular detached bit of Dormer was listening and listening for something else. Watching and watching, too, all those faces under tin helmets and just above gas-mask wallets, all so alike under those conditions that it seemed as difficult to pick out one man from another as one mule from another. Listening for one man to say "I am the one!" to be able to see him, and know that at last he had got rid of that job at Vanderlyden's. But nothing happened. It was always just going to happen.

At length the Division moved right up into the coal-fields and sat down by a slag heap near Béthune. Then Colonel Birchin called to him one morning across the office: "I say, Dormer, I've got the whereabouts of that fellow Chirnside. He's near Rheims. You'll have to go."

Dormer went. For two whole days he travelled across civilian France. France of the small farm, the small town, and the small villa. Far beyond the zone of the English Army, far beyond the zone of any army, he passed by Creil to Paris, and from Paris on again into a country of vine-clad hills above a river. He was in a part where

he had never been as a soldier, never gone for one of those brief holidays to Switzerland he had sometimes taken. It caused him much amusement to think of the regular Calais-Bâle express of pre-War days. If they would only run that train now, how it would have to zig-zag over trenches, and lines of communication.

He entered the zone of a French Army. On all sides, in the towns and villages, in the camps and manœuvre areas, he saw blue-coated men, and stared at them, with the same fascinated interest as he now felt, in spite of himself, in spite of any habit or tradition or inclination, in his own khaki variety. These fellows carried more on their backs, had far less transport. His general impression was of something grimmer, more like purgatory, than that which English troops gave him. The physical effort of the individual was greater, his food, pay and accommodation less. And there was none of that extraordinary volunteering spirit of the Kitchener Armies, the spirit which said: "Lumme, boys, here's a war. Let's have a go at it!" The French had most of them been conscripted, had known that such a thing might, probably would happen to them, had been prepared for it for years. They had not the ad-

vantage of being able to say to themselves: "Well, I jolly well asked for it. Now I've got it!"

A saturnine fate brooded over them. He noticed it in the railway and other officials he met. They were so much more official. R.T.O.s and A.P.M.s—or the equivalent of them, he supposed—who surveyed his credentials, and passed him on to the place where he was going, did so with the cynical ghost of amusement, as who should say: "Aha! This is you. You're going there, are you? You might as well go anywhere else."

Eventually, in a stony village, beneath a pine-clad ridge, he found the familiar khaki and brass, the good nature and amateurishness of his own sort. He stepped out of the train and across a platform and with a curious pang, almost of homesickness, found himself in England. Here was the superior corporal in slacks from the orderly room. Here were the faultless riding horses, being exercised. There was nothing like them in all the blue-coated armies through which he had passed. The Commandant to whom he reported, treated him partly as an officer reporting, partly as a nephew, asked amused questions about billets in Flanders, who was doing such-

and-such a job with Corps, what were the prospects of leave, and above all, did Dormer play bridge? He did. Ah! Then the main necessities of modern warfare were satisfied.

And as he found his billet and changed his clothes, Dormer reflected how right it all was. What was the good of being officious and ill-tempered? What was the good of being energetic even? Here we all were, mixed up in this inferno. The most sensible, probably the most efficient thing to do, was to forget it every night for a couple of hours, and start fresh in the morning. Chirnside was away with his detachment, but would be back shortly. In the meantime the Commandant hoped Dormer would join his Mess. The billet was comfortable and Dormer made no objection. On the contrary, he settled down for a day or two with perfect equanimity. It was always a day or two nearer the inevitable end of the War, which must come sometime, a day or two without risk, and actually without discomfort. What more could one ask?

The Commandant, Major Bone, was a fine-looking man, past middle age, with beautiful grey hair and blue eyes with a twinkle. His height and carriage, a certain hard-wearing and inexpen-

sive precision about his uniform, suggested an ex-guards Sergeant-major. It was obvious that he had spent all his life in the army, took little notice of anything that went on outside it, and felt no qualms as to a future which would be provided for by it. He was one of those men with whom it was impossible to quarrel, and Dormer pleased him in the matter of blankets. The Major offered some of those necessities to Dormer, who was obliged to reply that he had six and feared his valise would hold no more. He had won the old man's heart.

The Major had fixed his billet in a little house belonging to the representative of some firm auxiliary to the wine trade. The little office had become his office. Orders, nominal rolls, lists of billets and maps hung over the advertisements of champagne, and photographs of Ay and Epernay. On the other side of the hall, the little dining-room suited the Major admirably, as his Mess. It had just that substantial stuffiness that he considered good taste. The chairs and table were heavy, the former upholstered in hot crimson, as was the settee. Upon the mantelpiece, and upon pedestals disposed wherever there was room and sometimes where there was not, were bronze

female figures named upon their bases "Peace," "Chastity," "The Spirit of the Air." Dormer did not admire them. They were nude. As if this were not enough they had their arms either before them or behind them, never at their sides, which seemed to him to aggravate the matter. Together with a capacious sideboard, full of glass and china, *couronnes de noces* and plated ware, all securely locked in, these decorations made it almost impossible to move, once the company was seated at table.

Indeed, during the winter, the Major complained he had been in the position of having one place frozen at the door, and one roasted next the Salamander anthracite stove. But with the milder weather, things were better, for the two big casement windows could be opened, and filled the room with sweet country air in a moment; they gave on to the street which was merely a village street, and across the road, over the wall was a vineyard. The Mess consisted of the Major, Doctor, Ordnance Officer, and Chirnside, whose place Dormer temporarily took. There they were a happy little family, removed far from the vexations attending larger and smaller formations, isolated, with their own privileges,

leave list, and railway vouchers, as pretty a corner as could be found in all that slow-moving mass of discomfort and ill-ease that was the War.

On the third day, Dormer's conscience made him inquire how long Chirnside would be. "Not long," was the reply. "You can hear what's going on?" He could indeed. For two days the earth and air had been atremble with the bombardment. French people in the village, and the French soldiers about the place had a sort of cocksure way of saying "*Ça chauffe?*" Indeed, the offensive had been widely advertised and great things were expected of it.

Then finally Chirnside did return. Dormer had been doing small jobs for the Major all day, because idleness irked him, and on coming back to change, found a grizzled oldish man, thin and quiet, a slightly different edition of the Major, the same seniority, the same ranker traditions, but memories of India and Egypt instead of Kensington and Windsor. Dormer listened quietly while the two old soldiers discussed the offensive. There was no doubt that it was an enormous and costly failure. That hardly impressed him. He was used to and expected it. But he had never before seen an offensive from outside.

He had always been in them, and too tired and short of sleep, by the time they failed, to consider the matter deeply. But this time he listened to the conversation of the two old men with wonder mixed with a curious repulsion. They were hard working, hospitable, but they had the trained indifference of the regular soldier that seemed to him to be so ominous. In the regular army, where every one shared it, where it was part of a philosophy of life derived from the actual conditions, and deliberately adopted like a uniform, all very well. But no one knew better than Dormer that none of the armies of 1917 contained any appreciable percentage of regulars, but were, on the other hand, composed of people who had all sorts of feelings to be considered and who had not the slightest intention of spending their lives in the army. Not for the first time did he wonder how long they would stand it.

The Doctor and Ordnance Officer being busy sorting casualties and replacing stores, there was no bridge that evening and he was able to approach Chirnside as to the object of his journey. The old man heard him with a sort of quizzical interest, but was evidently inclined to be helpful, twisted his grey moustache points and let his

ivory-yellow eyelids droop over his rather prominent eyes.

"Spanish Farm. April 1916. Oh, aye!"

"Could you recall an incident that occurred there. Damage to a little chapel in the corner of the pasture where the roads met. A driver wanted to shelter his mules and broke into the place?"

Chirnside thought hard, looking straight at Dormer. It was obvious to Dormer that the old man was thinking, with army instinct, "Here, what's this I'm getting involved in? No you don't," and hastened to reassure him.

"It's like this. The case has become unfortunately notorious. The French have taken it up very strongly. You know what these things are, once they become official test cases. We've got to make an arrest and probably pay compensation as well, but at present our people at Base are sticking out for treating it as a matter of discipline. The unit was the 469 T.M.B., but there have been so many casualties that no one can tell me the name of the driver who did it."

Dormer was thinking: "There, that's the umpteenth time I've told the yarn, and what

good is it?" When suddenly he had a stroke of genius:

"Of course, they've got hold of your name."

It succeeded remarkably well. A sort of habitual stiffening was obvious in the Army-worn old face in front of him. Chirnside shifted his legs.

"I can't tell y'much about it. I don't know the chap's name or number, and I expect all the rolls are destroyed. Anyway he might not be on them, for he wasna' a driver!"

Chirnside was relapsing into his native Scotch, but Dormer didn't notice. He had got a clue.

"What was he then?"

"He had been servant to young Fairfield, who was killed."

"You don't remember Fairfield's regiment. That might help us?"

"No, I don't, and it wouldn't help you, for he came out to Trench Mortars, and not with his own crowd. This servant of his he picked up at Base, or from some employment company."

"What on earth was he doing with those mules?"

"What could you do with 'em? The driver was killed and the limber smashed to matchwood. The feller had nothing to do, so he did that!"

"You don't remember what happened to him after that?"

"Um—I think he went as young Andrews' servant."

"Ah! What did he come from?"

"Andrews? Gunner, he was!"

"Thanks. That may help. You saw the row when the Mayor of the village came to certify the damage?"

"Aye, there was some blethers about the business. You couldna' wonder. The old feller was got up like a Tattie Bogle. The men had had no rest, and were going straight back to the line. They marched all right, but you couldn't keep them from calling names at such a Guy—young troops like that!"

"You couldn't describe Andrews' servant to me?"

"No. He looked ordinary!"

A mistake of course, no use to ask old Chirnside things like that. A third of a century in the army had long ago drilled out of him any sort of imagination he might ever have had. He was just doing a handsome thing by a brother officer in remembering at all. His instinct was obviously to know nothing about it. But, piqued

by the novelty of Commissioned rank, he went on: "Yes, I can tell you something. That feller had a grievance. I remember something turning up in one of his letters, when we censored 'em. Lucky spot when you think how most of the censoring was done."

"I should think so. What was it?"

"Couldn't say now. Grievance of some sort. Didn't like the army, or the War, or something."

Dormer sat down and wrote out the information obtained and made his preparations to rejoin the Division. The Major said: "Oh, no hurry, stop another day, now you're here!" And all that evening, as he thought and wrote, and tried to believe this fatal business a step nearer completion, he heard the two old soldiers, like two good-natured old women, gossiping. Each expected the other to know every camp or barrack in which he had lain, each named this or that chance acquaintance, made any time those thirty years, anywhere in the world, as though the other must know him also. Often this was the case, in which they both exclaimed together, "Ah, nice feller, wasn't he?" Or, if it were not the case, the other would rejoin, "No, but I knew So-and-so, of the sappers," and probably the second shot

would hit the mark. It could hardly fail to do so in the old close borough of the Regular Army. And then they would exclaim in unison again.

Dormer was as impressed as he ever was by any member of the Professional Army. They knew how to do it. He would never know. The army was their God and King, their family and business. In a neat circle they went, grinding out the necessary days to their pensions. The present state of Europe, while verbally regretted or wondered at, did not scratch the surface of their minds. How could it? It had been a golden opportunity for them. It made the difference to them and to any human wife or family they might have accreted, between retiring on Commissioned pay-scale, or taking a pub or caretaker's place, as the ex-Sergeant-major they would otherwise have been. But there was charm in their utter simplicity. Nothing brutal, very little that was vain, and some nicely acquired manners.

The offensive of the French Army, in the machinery of which they had their places, moved them not at all. Chirnside casually mentioned that he gathered it had been a big failure. Dormer expected to hear him recite some devastating tale of misdirected barrage, horrible casualties

or choked communications. Nothing so graphic reached him. The old man had simply attended to his job, and when he found that the troops were returning to the same billets, drew his own conclusions. That was all. Dormer was horrified, but no one could be horrified long with Chirnside. Of course, he didn't mind how long the War went on.

Having completed his preparations, Dormer went up to his little room and was soon asleep. He was in fine condition and thoroughly comfortable, and was astonished after what appeared to be a very short interval, to find himself wide awake. There was no mistaking the reason. It was the row in the street. He pulled on his British Warm and went to look. It was quite dark, but he could make out a confused crowd surging from side to side of the little street, could see bayonets gleaming, and could hear a clamour of which he could not make out a word. It was like nothing he had ever heard in the War, it recalled only election time in his native city, the same aimless shuffling feet, the same confusion of tongues, the same effervescence, except that he had instinct enough to know from the tones of the voices that they were raised in

lamentation, not triumph. He was extremely puzzled what to do, but clear that no initiative lay with him. For ten minutes he waited, but the situation did not change. He opened his door very quietly. Not a sound from the Major. From Chirnside, opposite, heavy regular breathing. Above, in the attics, the low cockney brevity of soldier servants discussing something with the detachment of their kind. Reassured, he closed the door, and got back into his blankets. The noise was irritating but monotonous. He fell asleep. He next awoke to the knocking of his servant bringing his morning tea, and clean boots.

"What was all that row in the night?"

"Niggers, sir."

"What do you mean?"

"French coloured troops, sir. They got it in the neck seemingly. They don't half jabber."

Major Bone was more fully informed. There was no doubt that the French had had a nasty knock. Black troops were coming back just anyhow, out of hand, not actually dangerous, the old soldier allowed it to be inferred, but a nuisance. What struck him most forcibly was

the dislocation of the supply services. Defeat he accepted, but not unpunctuality.

"These Africans are besieging the station, trying to board the trains, and get taken back to Africa. I can't get hold of an officer, but Madame says they're all killed. She's in an awful state. I don't suppose you'll get away to-day!"

He was right enough. Dormer's servant shortly returned, humping the valise. The station was closed, the rolling stock had been removed. The black troops were swarming everywhere, collapsing for want of food and sleep, disorganized and incoherent. Dormer went out shortly after and verified the state of affairs. He was not molested, so far had the breakdown gone, but was the object of what appeared to him most uncomplimentary allusions, but all in pidgin-French, too colonial for his fair, but limited, knowledge of the language. There was clearly nothing to be done, so far as transport went, that day, and he resigned himself to spending his time in the little Mess.

The Doctor and Ordnance Officer appeared at dinner with reassuring news. The failure of the

offensive had been bad, but the French had never really lost control and were getting their people in hand immediately. There was a rumour that a General who tried to restore order had been thrown into the river, but it might be only a tale. Major Bone was contemptuous of the whole thing. Do—what could they do, a lot of silly blacks? The French would cut off their rations and reduce them to order in no time. Thus the old soldier. But he did not prevent Dormer going to bed with a heavy heart. To him it was not so much a French offensive that had failed. It was another Allied effort, gone for nothing. His life training in apprehension made him paint the future in the gloomiest colours. Where would fresh men be obtained from? Whence would come the spirit —what they called morale in military circles—to make another attempt? If neither men nor morale were forthcoming, would the War drag out to a stalemate Peace? He had no extravagant theories for or against such an ending to it. To him it meant simply a bad bargain, with another war to make a better one looming close behind it. And his recent military training had also received an unaccustomed shock. A new army enlistment, he had seen nothing of the retreat

from Mons, and was far from being able to picture March or April 1918, still twelve months in the future.

For the first time in his life he had seen panic, confusion, rout. True, it was already stopped, but that did not expunge from his mind the sight, the noise, the smell even, of that crowd of black soldiers who had suddenly ceased to be soldiers, numbers standing in line, and had so dramatically re-become men. The staring eyeballs, the physical collapse, the officer-less medley of uncertain movement were all new to him, and all most distressing. Of course, the fellows were mere blacks, not the best material, and had probably been mishandled. But under a more prolonged strain, might not the same thing happen to others? The Germans were the least susceptible he judged, the Russians most. What would he not see, some day, if the War dragged on?

Whatever narrow unimaginative future his unadventurous mind conjured up, his far stronger faculty for getting on with the matter in hand soon obliterated. He was no visionary. Contemplation was not in him. Directly the trains were running he left that cosy little Mess of Major Bone's to rejoin. He left off thinking

about the War, and took up his job where he had, for a moment, allowed it to lie, disregarded under the stress of new events and strange emotions.

As the train moved on and on through French lines of communication he was wondering again about the fellow who had done the trick at Vanderlynden's, of how he was to be found, of how the whole thing would frame itself. These French chaps, whose transport he saw each side of him, Army Corps after Army Corps. Biggish men, several of them, in a round-shouldered fashion, due partly to their countrified occupation, partly to their uniform, with its overcoat and cross-straps. Browner skinned, darker of hair and eye than our men, they confirmed his long-established ideas about them, essentially a Southern people, whose minds and bodies were formed by Biscayan and Mediterranean influences. They would not be sentimental about mules, he would wager. On the other hand, they would not laugh at a Mayor. They did not laugh much as a rule, they frowned, stared, or talked rapidly with gestures, and then if they did laugh, it was uproariously, brutally, at some one's misfortunes. Satire they understood. But they missed entirely the gentle nag,

nag, nag of ridicule, that he used to hear from his own platoon or company, covering every unfamiliar object in that foreign land, because it was not up to the standard of the upper-middle-classes. To the French, life was a hard affair, diversified by the points at which one was less unfortunate than one's neighbour.

To the English, life was the niceness of a small class, diversified by the nastiness of everything else, and the nastiness was endlessly diverting. For the French were mere men, in their own estimation. Not so the poorer English of the towns. They were gentlemen. If they lapsed (and naturally they lapsed most of the time) they were comic to each other, to themselves even. How well he remembered, on the march, when the battalion had just landed, passing through a village where certain humble articles of domestic use were standing outside the cottage doors, waiting to be emptied. A suppressed titter had run all along the column.

A Frenchman would never have thought them funny, unless they fell out of a first-floor window on to some head and hurt it. Again, to a Frenchman, Mayor and Priest, Garde Champêtre and Suisse were officials, men plus authority and

therefore respectworthy. To Englishmen, they were officials, therefore not gentlemen, therefore ridiculous. If a big landowner, or member of Parliament, or railway director had walked into Vanderlynden's pasture, just as 469 T.M.B. fell in for their weary march back to the line, would they have laughed? Not they. But then those members of England's upper classes would not have worn tricolour sashes to enforce authority. So there you were. With this philosophic reflection he fell asleep.

Dormer returned to an army which was at its brightest. It had held the initiative in the matter of offensives for over a year and a half, and if no decision had been come to, a wide stretch of ground had been won, and hope, on the whole was high. From time to time there were rumours of a queer state of things in Russia, but it was far off and uncertain. The matter of the moment was Messines, the famous ridge which had been lost at the very beginning of the War and which was now to be regained. In this affair Dormer found himself busily engaged. Here were no waste downs of the Somme, but some of the most fertile land in the world.

Among other matters confronting the Generals

was the problem of how to keep civilians from rushing back to cultivate land of which they had been deprived for three years. The day came, the explosion of the great mines, so Dormer was told, was heard in London. If he did not hear it, it was because a well-directed long-range artillery bombardment, complicated by a bombing that was German and German only in its thoroughness, deafened and bewildered him, took his sleep, killed his servant, and stampeded the horses of all the divisional ammunition columns near him, so that his tent was trampled down, his belongings reduced to a state hardly distinguishable from the surrounding soil. However, the blow, such as it was, was successful. Irish and Scotch, Colonial and London divisions took that battered hillock that had defied them so long, and Dormer in spite of all his experience could not help thinking: "Oh, come, now we are really getting on."

But nothing happened. Dormer heard various reasons given for this, and twice as many surmises made about it, but well aware how much importance to attach to the talk that floated round Divisional Offices and Messes, relied upon his own experience and arithmetic. According

to him, nothing could happen, because each offensive needed months of preparation. Months of preparation made possible a few weeks of activity. A few weeks of activity gained a few square miles of ground. Then more months of preparation, grotesquely costly, and obvious to every one for a hundred miles, so that the enemy had just as long to prepare, made possible a few more weeks' activity and the gain of a few miles more.

This was inevitable in highly organized mechanical war, fought by fairly matched armies, on a restricted field, between the sea and the neutral countries. He admitted it. But then came his lifelong habit of reducing the matter to figures. He roughed out the area between the "front" of that date and the Rhine, supposing for the sake of argument that we went no farther, and divided this by the area gained, on an average, at the Somme, Vimy and Messines. The result he multiplied by the time taken to prepare and fight those offensives, averaged again. The result he got was that, allowing for no setbacks, and providing the pace could be maintained, we should arrive at the Rhine in one hundred and eighty years.

For the only time in his life Dormer wished

he were something other than Dormer. For a few moments after arriving at his conclusion, he desired to be a person of power and influence, some one who could say with weight that the thing ought to stop here and now. But this very unusual impulse did not last long with him.

All that remained of Belgium and wide tracts of French Flanders adjoining it, became one huge ant-heap. Never had there been such a concentration. Corps next to Corps, Services mosaiced between Services, twenty thousand men upon roads, no one could count how many handling munitions, as, from Ypres to the sea, the great offensive of 1917 slowly germinated.

Dormer was soon caught up and landed in the old familiar blackly-manured soil of the Salient. He was not disgusted or surprised. He was becoming increasingly conscious of a sensation of going round and round. Now, too, that troops were always pouring along a road before him, he had again the feeling that his head was an empty chamber, round which was painted a frieze, men, men, mules, men, limbers, guns, men, lorries, ambulances, men, men, men. It might be just worry and overwork, it might be that he was again forced to share his limited accommoda-

tion with Kavanagh. They were in a dug-out on the canal bank, just by one of those fatal causeways built to make the passage of the canal a certainty, instead of the gamble it had been in the days of the pontoon bridges. The passage became, like everything else in the War, a certainty for the Germans as much as for the Allies. The place was registered with the utmost precision and hit at all times of the day and night. It probably cost far more than the taking of any trench.

Amid the earth-shaking explosions that seldom ceased for long, in the twilight of that narrow cavern in the mud, Kavanagh was as unquenchable as he ever had been on the high and airy downs of the Somme. During the daylight, when nothing could be done outside, he bent over his map of cables while Dormer perfected his plan for getting first-line transport past that infernal canal. He purposed to send an N.C.O. a good two miles back, with small square pieces of card, on which were written 9.0 p.m., 9.5 p.m., and so on, the times being those at which the unit so instructed was to arrive beside his dug-out. He thought rather well of this idea, no jamming and confusion, and if the enemy made a lucky hit,

there would be fewer casualties and less to clear away. In the middle of his calculations he heard

"Why soldiers, why
Should we be melancholy,
Whose duty 'tis to die!"

He could not resist saying:

"If you must make that d——d noise, I wish you'd put some sense into it."

"Sense. I was trying to cheer you up!"

" 'Duty 'tis to die' is jolly cheering, and quite untrue."

"Oh, is it? What is our duty then?"

"Our duty is to live if we possibly can. And I mean to do it. It's the people who keep alive who will win the War."

"According to that, all one has got to do is to get to Blighty, or preferably the United States, and stay there?"

"Not a bit. You exaggerate so. All I said was, that it is foolish to make it a duty to become a casualty."

"Dormer, I shall never get you to see things in the proper light. You're like a lamb trying to leap with joy, and never able to get its hind legs off the ground."

"This is all rot. What connection is there

between lambs and leaping, and our jobs? Mine is to see that various people and things are in the position where they will be wanted, at the moment at which they will have most effect in winning the War. Yours is to see that they can speak and be spoken to when required."

"Lovely, lovely! What a teacher you would have made."

"I had a better job."

"There is no better job, except perhaps the one we are doing. I do admire your descriptions of them. All you want is to put in a personal allegorical note. You might condense the whole thing by saying that you will be Minerva if I will be Mercury. Yep?"

"Whatever are you talking about?"

"Yours to see that all is in order. That is a matter of reason. You are the Goddess. I am merely a lesser God. Mercury was God of Communications. I wonder whether they'd let me design a cap badge for signallers. Mercury playing on a buzzer. You may have your Owl!"

"Oh, shut up."

"I fear I must, the bugle calls, and I must follow, or my watch shows it is time I was looking

after my chaps. But you've had a brilliant idea, Dormer."

"I?"

"You've had the idea of fighting the War allegorically. Wisdom and Light we are. That would do away with half the horror. So long!" Then queerly, instead of feeling relieved from an annoyance, Dormer felt more despondent than ever. What could it be? Was the fellow right? Surely not! All that nonsense! And yet—and yet what would not he, Dormer, conscious of his own probity, have given to be conscious instead, of Kavanagh's lightness of heart? That very probity drove him out in the all-too-late summer dusk to see that everything was going right. Yes, here they were; details of transport, parties to dig, parties to carry, details of services, engineers of all their various grades. Punctual, incredibly docile, honest English in their gestureless manner of getting on with the job. They took care of their mules, look at these beasts pulling as though they were English too (instead of the Argentine crossbreds he knew them to be), not because it was a duty, although it was, and not because the mule was a miracle, like a tank or an aeroplane, but just because it was a mule, that

meant, to English soldiers, and to English soldiers only, a fellow-creature, a human being. On they went, reporting to him, and pushing on, sometimes with a hurried question as to map square, or other crucial uncertain detail, sometimes with only a grunt. That endless procession had not been in progress many minutes before, amid the considerable and gently growing shell-fire came a bang that seemed to go right through his head. He knew from old trench experience what it was. Nothing but a gun pointing straight at you could make that particular hrrmph.

He set his feet, not a moment too soon. It was a five-nine, the sort the French called "*Grande Vitesse*." A whirlwind, a small special whirlwind pointed like an arrow, hit the causeway so that it shook and then went up with a wheel of splintered bits. He was glad he had devised his patent card system. The units were not too close together. He had time to shout to the next, "Come on, you've two minutes to get over!" and over they went, as if the Devil were after them, instead of a lump of Krupp steel fitted with lethal chemicals. They were hardly over before the second came, whump! To say that Dormer was frightened, was to fail to describe the matter.

He was stiffened all over, his hair stood up, his heart thumped so that it hurt him, his feet were stone cold, but he knew his job and did it.

The next lot to come was a whole field company to do some special duty, and although he hurried them, the tail of the brown column was still high and exposed when the shell came. They ducked and darted into any cover that was available, and he heard his voice, as the voice of some one far away speaking to a public meeting, like a voice on the wireless, saying:

"Come on. Get out of that and come on. If I can stand here, surely you can get out of it."

They did so. Behind them came a special party to dig in the Meteorological Officer. What a menagerie it was! Every trade, every nation too, Chinese, Zulu, West Indian, Egyptian. He did not blame the Germans who had chalked in blue on the bare back of a Portuguese, whom they captured and stripped, "The Monkey House is full," before they drove him back into English lines.

Even truer did Dormer find it when he had to go back for any reason, to Corps H.Q. or beyond. French and Belgians he knew, he had found them in the trenches beside him years before. Portuguese he had become accustomed to, Americans

he looked forward to with anticipation. But farther back, he found Chinese, Africans of all descriptions, Indians, East and West, while the French, in addition to their black troops, had Spanish and Italian labour.

It did not please his parochial mind. He felt increasingly that there was something wrong when you had to drag in all these coloured people from every remote quarter of the globe, without even the excuse the French had, that they were "Colonials." But no one could tell, least of all Dormer himself, whether his feelings were the result of a strong belief in the Colour Bar, or whether it were merely the futility of it all. For in spite of the *omnium gatherum* of race, tongue and religion, the offensive failed. As a matter of routine, the weather broke on Z day. Within forty-eight hours it was obvious that the affair had stuck. Apart from a feeling of the hand of Fate in it, a sinister feeling of great incomprehensible forces working out his destiny for him, without his having the least power to influence the matter for better, for worse, which was so desolating to his pre-War habit of mind, where a certain line of unostentatious virtue had always carried a reward that could be reckoned on with the greatest

exactitude, there were other disturbing elements in the situation.

Of course the Bosche was ready. He was bound to be ready, couldn't avoid it. He had immensely thickened his depth of defence, which was now composed not of the old obvious trenches full of men, all of which could be blown to pieces, but of small isolated turrets of ferro-concrete, where two or three machine gunners (and who made better machine gunners than the careful Germans) could hold an army at bay, until dislodged by a direct hit by a shell of six-inch calibre or over, or laboriously smoke-screened and bombed out, at the rate of perhaps a mile a day, on good days. He saw his computation of one hundred and eighty years altogether insufficient for getting to the Rhine. Moreover, for such work this medley of nations was of no good at all. It reminded him of a book by Anatole France he had been compelled by a friend to read, wherein a great conqueror enlisted in his army all the men of his nation, then all the men of the neighbouring nations, then all the savages at the end of the earth, and finally the baboons and other combatant animals. That was all very well. That was just story telling. But it horrified Dormer

all the more to see such story telling coming true before his eyes. As coloured-labour company after coloured-labour company filed past his tent, guttural and straggling, he was able to pull himself together, and see that it was not true after all.

These people, little better than beasts, uglier in some cases and far more troublesome, were no good. They couldn't fight. You couldn't trust them to stand the shelling or to obey an order. Then just as he was feeling rather relieved, he saw the logical result of his conclusion. All the fighting would have to be done by those very men who had volunteered or been conscripted and who had been so generously wasted ever since. They were sticking it, and sticking it well, but this new offensive that had just opened promised to try them pretty high. Would they stick that? Would the day ever come when he would see them a mere mob, like those French black troops he had seen in May? Perhaps peace would be made. Such is the eternal hopefulness of men, that he even hoped, against all previous experience. That quenchless gleam common to all human souls, one of the basic things that makes war so long, and peace, where it is so much less necessary, just that much less attractive, added to work

for fifteen hours a day, kept Dormer sane and healthy for weeks, in spite of worsening conditions, and the steady increase in enemy shelling. It was with a return of that uncanny feeling of being haunted that he found himself called up to Divisional Head-quarters. He knew quite well what it was, but he had relied on the difficulty of finding Andrews, on the tremendous strain of this most costly and urgent of all offensives, to keep the matter out of his path, or rather to keep him out of its path, for he had long dropped into the habit of feeling himself as in a nightmare, pursued by something he could not see or even imagine, but which was certainly sinister and personally fatal to him.

When he got to the office his feeling of nightmarishness was rather aggravated than allayed. Colonel Birchin was talking to the A.D.M.S. The fact was that the A.D.M.S. was a new one, patently a Doctor who had been fetched out from Doctoring, had been found capable of organization and had been shoved into the job vice someone else gone higher up. Beside him Colonel Birchin shone, as it were, with the glamour of another world. Dormer had seen him in camp and hut, and château and Mairie for a year and a

half, just like that, handsome and sleek, filling his plain but choice khaki with a distinction that no foreign officer could gain from all the blues and reds and yellows and greens and blacks, varnished belts and metal ornaments of other armies. And in that moment of sharpened nerves and unusual power of vision Dormer seemed to see why. Colonel Birchin was not an officer of a national army in the sense that any French, German, Italian or Russian Colonel was. There was nothing of the brute and nothing of the strategian about those nice manners, that so easily and completely excluded everything that was—what? Unmilitary? Hardly. There was nothing consciously, offensively military about the Colonel, "regular" or professional soldier that he was. He would never have swaggered in Alsace, massacred in Tripoli, Dreyfused in France. He would never have found it necessary. For Colonel Birchin was not a state official. He was an officer of the Watch, the small band of paid soldiers that Stuart and subsequent kings kept to defend themselves from mobs, national armies and other inconvenients. Colonel Birchin might write himself as of "The Herefordshire Regiment," but it made no difference. His chief, inherited, and most

pronounced quality was that he was a courtier. He represented the King. Preferably, at home, of course, where one could live in all that thick middle-class comfort that had ousted the old land-owning seignorial dignity and semi-starvation. But upon occasion, Colonel Birchin could betake himself to Africa, India, and now even to this France, sure that even in this most tedious and unpleasant of wars, he would be properly fed and housed.

So here he was, representing the King even more exactly than before he was seconded from the King's own Herefordshire Regiment. He spoke and looked, in fact, rather as if he were the King. Ignorant and unused to the immense transport, the complicated lists of highly scientific equipment, he judged rightly enough that his one safe line was to represent authority, and see that these semi-civilians who did understand such things got on with the War. So he listened in a gentlemanly way to the A.D.M.S. (who wore beard and pince-nez) explaining at great length a difficult alternative as to the siting of Forward Dressing Stations, and contributed:

"You do what is best, Doctor, and we shall back you up!"

Then he turned to Dormer, hunted a moment among the papers on the table, and spoke:

"Look here, Dormer, about this affair of yours?"

It took all Dormer's training to keep his mouth shut. He saw more clearly than ever how Colonel Birchin and all like him and all he represented, were divesting themselves of any connection with what looked like a nasty, awkward, tedious and probably discreditable business. But he had not grasped it.

"They've found Andrews—this—er—gunner, who will be able to give you information. And —look here, Dormer—this affair must be cleared up, do you understand? Andrews is in hospital. You can go by car to Boulogne, but we expect you to get it done this time. Corps are most annoyed. There's been a nice how-d-y-do with the French."

Dormer swallowed twice and only said:

"Really, sir."

"Yes. Car starts at seven."

Accordingly at seven, the big Vauxhall moved off from that little group of huts, in the meadow that was so regularly bombed every night. Dormer, sitting next to Major Stevenage, did not

mind. As well Boulogne as anywhere, while this was going on. All the roads were full of transport, all the railways one long procession of troop and supply trains. It was about as possible to hide it all from the Germans, as to conceal London on a Bank Holiday. In fact it was rather like that. The population was about the same, if the area were rather larger, the effect of the crowd, the surly good humour, the air of eating one's dinner out of one's hand was the same.

There was very little sign of any consciousness of the shadow that hung over it all. Hospital trains and ambulances abounded, going in the opposite direction, but no one noticed them, so far as Dormer could see. The type of man who now came up to fight his country's battles was little changed. The old regular was hardly to be found. The brisk volunteer was almost gone. Instead there had arisen a generation that had grown used to the War, had had it on their minds so long, had been threatened with it so often that it had lost all sharpness of appeal to their intellects.

Right back to St. Omer the crowd stretched. Beyond that it became more specialized. Air Force. Hospitals. Training grounds. Then,

across high windy downs, nothing, twenty miles of nothing, until a long hill and the sea.

Up there on those downs where there was no one, never had been anybody ever since they were pushed up from the bed of some antediluvian ocean, and covered with short turf, Dormer had one of his rare respites from the War. Briefer perhaps, but more complete than that which he experienced on his rare leaves, he felt for a while the emancipation from his unwilling thraldom. It was the speed of the car that probably induced the feeling. Anyhow, on the level road that runs from Boulogne to Étaples—the ETAPPS of the Army in France—he lost it. Here there was no escaping the everlasting khaki and transport, that State of War into which he had been induced, and out of which he could see no very great possibility of ever emerging. He had no warning of what was to come, and was already well among the hospitals and dumps that extended for miles beside the railway, when a military policeman held up a warning hand.

"What's the matter, Corporal?"

"I should not go into Etapps this morning, if I were you, sir.'

"Why not?"

The man shifted his glance. He did not like the job evidently.

"Funny goings-on, there, sir."

"Goings-on, what does that mean?"

Dormer was capable of quite a good rasp of the throat, when required. He had learned it as a Corporal.

"The men are out of 'and, sir!"

"Are they? The A.P.M. will see to that, I suppose."

"Very good, sir."

"Drive on!"

Dormer didn't like it, to tell the truth. But he was so used to bluffing things he didn't like, and his own feelings, and other people's awkwardness, that he could not do otherwise than go on. Also he didn't realize what was on foot. A certain amount of daily work was being done in among the dumps and sidings where the population was of all sorts of non-combatant, Labour Corps units, medical formations, railway people, and others. But from the rise by the Reinforcement Officers' hut, he began to see. The whole of the great infantry camp on the sandhill—and it was very full, he had heard people say that there were a hundred thousand men there—seemed to have

emptied itself into the little town. Here they sauntered and talked, eddying a little round the station and some of the larger *estaminets*, in motion like an ant-hill, in sound like a hive of bees. The car was soon reduced to a walking pace, there were no police to be seen, and once entered there was no hope of backing out of that crowd, and no use in appearing to stop in it.

"Go slow," Dormer ordered, glancing out of the corner of his eye at the wooden face of the chauffeur. Nothing to be seen. Either the man didn't like it, or didn't feel the necessary initiative to join in it, or perhaps considered himself too superior to these foot-sloggers to wish to be associated with them. Most probably he hadn't digested the fact that this mob, through which he drove his officer, was Mutiny, the break-up of ordered force, and military cohesion. It might even be the end of the War and victory for the Germans. All this was apparent enough in a moment to Dormer, who was careful to look straight again to his front, unwinking and mute, until with a beating heart, he saw that they were clear of the jam in the Market Place, and well down the little street that led to the bridge across which were the farther hospitals, and various sun-

dry Base Offices, in the former of which he was to find Andrews. Now therefore, he did permit himself to light a cigarette. But not a word did he say to his chauffeur. Now that it was behind him he had the detachment to reflect that it was a good-humoured crowd. He had heard a gibe or so that might have been meant for him or no, but in the main, not being hustled, all those tens of thousands that had broken camp, chased the police off the streets, and committed what depredations he did not know, were peaceful enough, much too numerous and leaderless to make any cohesive threat to an isolated officer, not of their own unit, and therefore not an object of any special hatred, any more than of any special devotion, just a member of another class in the hierarchy, uninteresting to simple minds, in which he caused no immediate commotion.

Here, on the road that ran through the woods to Paris Plage there were little knots of men, strolling or lying on the grass. They became fewer and fewer. By the time he arrived at the palace, mobilized as a hospital, for which he was bound, there remained no sign of the tumult. Here, as on the other flank, by the Boulogne road, Medical and Base Units functioned unmoved.

But the news had been brought by Supply and Signal services and the effect of it was most curious.

Dormer had to pass through the official routine, had to be announced, had to have search made for young Andrews, and finally was conducted to a bed in Ward C., on which was indicated Captain Andrews, R.G.A. Dormer of course wanted to begin at once upon his mission, but the other, a curly haired boy, whose tan had given place to a patchy white under loss of blood from a nasty shrapnel wound in the leg, that kept on turning septic, had to be "scraped" or "looked at," each of these meaning the operation table, and was only now gradually healing, would not let him.

Once away from the theatre and the knife, Andrews, like any other healthy youngster, soon accumulated any amount of animal spirit, lying there in bed, adored by the nursing sisters, admired by the men orderlies. He was not going to listen to Dormer's serious questions. He began:

"Cheerio! Sit on the next bed, there's no corpse in it, they've just taken it away. Anyhow, it isn't catching. Have a cigarette, do for

God's sake. They keep on giving me the darned things, and they all end in smoke!"

"Sorry you got knocked out."

"Only fair. Knocked out heaps of Fritzes. I gave 'em what for, and they gave me some back. I say, have you just come from the town?"

"I have just motored through."

"Is it true that our chaps have broke loose?"

"There's a certain amount of disorder, but no violence that I could see."

Dormer was conscious of heads being popped up in all the surrounding beds. So that was how it took them! Of course, they were bored stiff.

"How topping. Is it true that they've killed all the red-caps?"

"I didn't see any signs of it."

"Cleared up the remains had they? Picked the bones, or fallen in proper burying parties."

"I don't think there was anything of that sort."

"Oh, come now, first we heard they had set on a police-corporal that had shot a Jock."

"What did he do that for?"

"Dunno. It isn't the close season for Jocks, anyhow. Then it was ten police-corporals. The last rumour was that they'd stoned the A.P.M. to death——"

And so it went on. Lunch-time came. A Doctor Major, impressed by Dormer's credentials, invited him into the Mess, and asked a lot of questions about the front, the offensive, and the state of Étaples. Dormer always liked those medical messes. It seemed so much more worth while to mend up people's limbs, rather than to smash them to bits. The Doctors had their professional "side" no doubt, but they had a right to it.

After lunch Dormer made his way back to Ward C. He was met by a hush, and by a little procession. The Sergeant-major came first and after him bearers with a stretcher covered by the Union Jack. The hush in the ward was ominous. They were all so close to what had happened. It was not like the open field where the casualty is a casualty and the living man a different thing. Here the dead were only different in degree, not in kind. They were worse "cases"—the worst, that was all. So there were no high spirits after lunch. They had gibed about Death in the morning, but Death had come and they had ceased to gibe. In the silence, Dormer felt awkward, did not know how to begin. When he had made up his mind that he must, he looked up and

found Andrews was asleep. So the day wore on to tea-time, and after tea he was not wanted in the ward, and was wanted in the Mess. He himself was not hurrying to return to any regularly bombed hut near Poperinghe. The Commanding Officer was even more emphatic. Étaples was not safe. Dormer let it go at that, and got a good game of bridge.

In the morning he found young Andrews as young as ever and got down to his job at once:

"Do you remember joining 469 T.M.B.?"

"Yes, sh'd think I do."

"Do you remember the man you had as servant while you were with them?"

"I do. Topping feller. Gad, I was sorry when I had to leave him behind. Of course, I dropped him when I went to hospital. Never was so done!"

At last!

"You couldn't give me his name and number, I suppose?"

"I must have got a note of it somewhere. I say, what's all this about? Do you want to get hold of him?"

"I do. He's wanted, over a question of damage in billets. They've sent me to find him out."

"Then I'm damned if I'll tell you. Because he was a topping chap!" rejoined Andrews, laughing.

"You'd better tell me, I think. The matter has gone rather high up, and it might be awkward if I had to report that the information was refused."

"Lord, you aren't going to make a Court of Inquiry affair of it, are you?"

"It may come to that, and they've got hold of your name."

"Gee whizz! I don't like landing the chap. I may not have got any particulars of him, now, my things have been so messed about."

"Well, look and see!"

"All right."

Andrews fumbled out from the night-table beside his bed, the usual bedside collection. Letters in female handwriting, some young, some old —from one or more sweethearts and a mother, thought Dormer. Paper-covered novels. The sort (English) that didn't make you think. The sort (French) that make you feel, if you were clever at the language. Cigarettes, bills. One or two letters from brother officers.

"Blast. It's in my Field Note Book, in my

valise, in store here. I shall have to send to have it got out. Wait half a mo' and I'll get an orderly."

As they waited, he went on:

"What's he wanted for? Some dam' Frenchman going to crime him for stealing hop-poles?"

"Something of that sort. You wouldn't remember it, it happened before you joined the Battery."

"Then it jolly well wasn't my man Watson. He'd only just come up from Base!"

"Come, the man was of middle size and ordinary to look at, and had been servant to an officer of the name of Fairfield, who was killed!"

"Oh, that chap. I know who you mean now. I don't call him my servant. I only had him for a day or two. His name was Smith, as far as I can recollect. We were in the line, and I never got his number. He disappeared, may have been wounded, or gone sick of course, we were strafed to Hell, as usual. I should have got rid of him in any case. He was a grouser!"

"Didn't like the War?"

"I should say not."

Hopeless, of course. When Andrews saw Dor-

mer rise and close his notebook, he apologized:

"Beastly sorry. Afraid I'm no good."

"That's all right. I don't want to find the fellow, personally. It's simply my job."

"Fair wear and tear, so to speak?"

"Yes. Good morning."

"Don't go—I say, don't. You're just getting interesting!" Heads popped up in the surrounding beds. "Do tell us what it's all about."

"Merely a matter of damage in billets as I said."

"Go on. There's always damage in billets. You must ha' done heaps, haven't you? I have. There's something more in it than that."

"Well, there is. Perhaps it will be a lesson to you not to go too far with other people's property."

"I say, don't get stuffy. What did the feller do?"

"He broke into a shrine."

"I say, that's a bit thick."

"It was!"

"What did he do it for? Firewood?"

"No. He wanted to shelter a couple of mules!"

"Good man. Don't blame him!"

"No!"

"But they can't crime him for a thing like that?"

"They will if they can catch him."

"Go on!"

"It didn't stop at that." Once more it seemed to Dormer that a good lesson might do no harm to the light-headed youth that Andrews represented, and several of whom were listening anxiously from that corner of the ward.

"Did G.H.Q. take it up?"

"Yes. They had to. The Mayor of the village came to make an official inquiry and the Battery made fun of him."

"Lumme! I bet they did!"

"They should not have done so. That made the French authorities take it up. Goodness knows where it will end!"

"End in our fighting the French," said some one.

Dormer felt that it was high time to put his foot down. "You may be privileged to talk like that while you're in hospital. But I don't recommend you to do so outside. You ought to have the sense to know that we don't want to fight anyone, we most certainly don't want to fight some

one else after Germans. In any case, we don't want to do the fighting in England!"

There was a dead silence after he had spoken, and he rose, feeling that he had impressed them. He stumped out of the ward without another word, went to the Mess, rang and demanded his car. The Orderly Officer would have liked to detain him, insisted on the possible state of Étaples, but he would not hear of it. In those few hours he had had enough and more than enough of the Base—the place where people talked while others Did—the place where the pulse of the War beat so feebly. He felt he would go mad if he stayed there, without sufficient occupation for his mind. His car appeared and he soon left the palace and the birchwoods, and was rattling over the bridge into Étaples. "Now for it!" he thought. But no policeman warned him off this time. He soon saw why. The streets had resumed their normal appearance. He might have known. That fancy of his, about the Headless Man, came back to him with its true meaning. What could they do, all those "Other Ranks," as they were designated? Just meander about, fight the police, perhaps. But they had no organization, no means of rationing or transport. Of course, they

had had to go back to their respective camps with their tails between their legs in order to get fed.

There was nothing to show for the whole business but a few panes of broken glass and some splintered palings. By the time he got to St. Omer and stopped for lunch, no one seemed to have heard of it. By tea-time, he was back at Divisional H.Q. And none too soon. A fresh attack was to be made the following day. He went straight up to the canal bank, where Kavanagh was as busy as ever, and dropped into his work where he had left it. There was just the same thing to do, only more of it. A desperate race against time was going on. It was evident enough that this most enormously costly of all offensives must get through before November finally rendered fighting impossible. There was still some faint chance of a week or two of fair weather in October. Fresh Corps were massed and flung into the struggle. Engineers, Labour Corps, anyone who could throw a bomb or fire a rifle must do so. What had been roads of stone *pavé*, had been so blown about with shell-fire that they were a honeycomb of gaping holes, repaired with planks. More and more searching were the barrages, denser the air fighting. Prog-

ress there undoubtedly was, but progress enough?

Through the sleepless nights and desperate days that followed, Dormer's feelings toward Kavanagh were considerably modified. The fellow still talked, but Dormer was less sorry to hear him. He even recited, and Dormer got into the way of listening. They were now in an "Elephant" hut. No dug-out was possible in that sector, where eighteen inches below the surface you came to water. No tent could be set, even had they wished for one. Their frail house was covered with sandbags, of a sufficient thickness to keep off shrapnel, and presumably they were too insignificant to be the object of a direct hit, but in order to leave nothing to chance they had had the place covered with camouflage netting. Outside lay mile after mile of water-logged runnels that had been trenches, on the smashed and slippery parapets of which one staggered to some bit of roadway that was kept in repair at gigantic cost in lives and materials, guided by the lines of wire that either side had put up with such difficulty, and which were all now entirely useless, a mere hindrance to free movement. But they were "in" for a long spell, and could not get away—did not want to, they were less bombed

here than farther back. Rations reached them, that was as much as they had time to care about. Otherwise, the night was well filled for the one with counting off the parties that filed past into this or that attack, for the other in picking up those signal lines that had been smashed by shell-fire during the day, and replacing them.

As that endless procession went past him once more, Dormer felt that he now knew of what its component parts were thinking. Australians, Canadians, Welsh, Scotch, Irish, English, they were thinking of nothing in particular. Like the mules that went with them, they went on because they couldn't stop. Food and sleep each day was the goal. To stop would mean less food and sleep, mules and men knew that much, without use of the reasoning faculty. It had become an instinct. All the brilliant casuistry that had induced men to enlist was forgotten, useless, superseded. Even English soldiers were conscripts now, the War had won, had overcome any and every rival consideration, had made itself paramount, had become the end and the means as well.

A man like Dormer, accustomed to an ordered and reasoned existence, who could have explained his every act up to August, 1914, by some good

and solid reason, was as helpless as any. Stop the War? You wanted to go back half a century and alter all the political and business cliques in which it had been hatching. To alter those you wanted to be able to alter the whole structure of society in European countries, which kept those cliques in power, was obliged to have recourse to them, to get itself governed and financed. To do that you wanted to change Human Nature. Here Dormer's imagination stopped dead. He was no revolutionary. No one was farther than he from being one. He only hated Waste. He had been brought up and trained to business, in an atmosphere of methodical neatness, of carefully foreseen and forestalled risks. Rather than have recourse to revolution he would go on fighting the Bosche. It was so much more real.

Somewhere about the point at which he reached this conclusion, he heard, among the noise of the sporadic bombardment, Kavanagh's voice:

" 'Now that we've pledged each eye of blue
And every maiden fair and true,
And our green Island Home, to you
The Ocean's wave adorning,
Let's give one hip, hip, hip hurrah,
And drink e'en to the coming day,

When squadron, square,
We'll all be there,
To meet the French in the morning!'

That's the stuff to give the troops, Dormer?"

But Dormer, although cheered, was not going to admit it. "You'd better go and sing it to the Seventy-Worst. They go in at dawn!"

"Good luck to them. Listen to this:

"'May his bright laurels never fade
Who leads our fighting Fifth Brigade,
These lads so true in heart and blade,
And famed for danger scorning;
So join me in one hip hurrah!
And drink e'en to the coming day,
When squadron, square,
We'll all be there,
To meet the French in the morning!'

How's that for local colour? Is there a Fifth Brigade in to-morrow's show? They'd like that."

"I bet they wouldn't. Anyhow, it's silly to repeat things against the French."

"Man, it's a hundred years old."

"Like my uncle's brandy."

"You and your uncle!"

"I had an uncle once who had some brandy.

It was called 'Napoleon,' and was supposed to date from 1815. When he opened it, it was gone!"

"There you are. That's your materialism. But you can sing a song a hundred years old and find it's not gone!"

"It's not a bad song. Only silly!"

"Well, try something older:

> " 'We be
> Soldiers three,
> Lately come from the Low Countree,
> *Pardonnez moi, je vous en prie;*
> We be
> Soldiers three.'

That's nearer three hundred years old. That's what fellows used to sing coming back from Ypres in those days!"

"You talk as if we'd always been in and out of that mangey hole."

They both leaned on their elbows and gazed out of the tiny aperture, under the sacking, away over the sea-like ridges of pulverized mud, into the autumn evening. Between the rain-clouds, torn and shredded as if by the shell-fire, watery gleams were pouring, as though the heavens were wounded and bled. They spilled all over the

jagged stonework of that little old medieval walled town, compact within its ramparts, for the third time in its history garrisoned by an English army. Kavanagh told him of it, but Dormer remained unimpressed. The history of the world that mattered began after the battle of Waterloo, with Commerce and Banking, Railway and Telegraph, the Education and Ballot Acts. Previous events were all very well, as scenery for Shakespeare's plays or Wagner's Operas. But otherwise, negligible. Yet the interlude did him good. He felt he had brought Kavanagh up short, in an argument, and he went to his night's work with a lighter heart, and a strengthened confidence in himself.

Of course, a few weeks later, the offensive was over, with the results he had foreseen, and with another result he was also not alone in foreseeing. Once back in rest, near Watten, he heard people talking in this strain, in G. office:

"I suppose, sir, we shall go on fighting next year?"

"Um—I suppose we shall. But perhaps some arrangement may be come to, first. There's been a good deal of talk about Peace!"

That was the mood of Divisional Head-

quarters. A growing scepticism as to the continuance of the War. At the moment, Dormer missed the motive at the back of it. Away from H.Q. while the Division was in action, he had lost a good deal of ominous news. The talk about the transference of German Divisions from one front to another was old talk. He had heard it for years. He did not at the moment grasp that it had now a new significance. Then something happened that put everything else out of his head. He was not feeling too well, though he had nothing to complain of worse than the usual effects of damp and loss of sleep. Colonel Birchin had got himself transferred to a better appointment, and his place was taken by a much younger officer, glad to take it as a "step" up from a dangerous and difficult staff-captaincy. They had been out at rest less than a week and Dormer had assumed as a matter of course that he would be put in charge of organized sports for the winter, as usual. But he was only just becoming sensible of the change that had come over H.Q. Colonel Birchin used to have a certain pre-War regular soldier's stiffness and want of imagination (which Dormer had privately deplored), but he had kept the Q. office well in

hand. This new man, Vinyolles, very amicable and pleasant, and much nearer to Dormer's new army view of the War (he was in fact younger than Dormer, and than most of the clerical N.C.O.s in the office), had nothing like the stand-off power of his predecessor. Also, the office, like everything else, had grown, half a dozen odd-job officers were now attached, and without wearing red, sat and worked with Dormer. So that when Dormer went to show his football Competition Time Table and his schedule for use of the Boxing Stadium, he found that he had to explain how these things were usually done. Colonel Vinyolles had no idea. Dormer ought to have been warned. But his head was not working at its very best. He had a temperature, he thought, and wanted to go and lie down at his billet for a bit and take some aconite, a remedy he had carried with him throughout the War. Colonel Vinyolles was quite nice about the Sports, and just as Dormer was turning to go, said to him:

"Perhaps you can help me in this matter. I see your name occurs in the correspondence!"

Of course, he might have known. It was the familiar *dossier*, as the French called it, the sheaf of papers, clipped together, at the bottom the

original blue Questionnaire form that old Jerome Vanderlynden had signed. At the top a fresh layer of official correspondence, "Passed to you, please, for necessary action." "This does not appear to concern this office." "Kindly refer to A.Q.M.G.'s minute dated July 1916." And so on. Dormer knew quite a lot of it by heart and the remainder he could have "reconstructed" with no difficulty. The only fresh thing that had happened was a minute from the new chief of the French Mission enclosing a cutting from a newspaper—a French newspaper of all conceivable rags—from which it appeared that some deputy or other had "interpellated" a minister about the matter, asked a question in the "House" would be the English of it, Dormer supposed.

"What am I to tell the Mission?" Colonel Vinyolles was asking.

Dormer was not a violent man by habit, but he felt that he was getting to his limit with this affair. He thought a moment, wanting to say: "Tell them to go to the Devil!" but held it in reserve, and substituted: "Tell them the matter has attention!"

"Thanks very much!"

Dormer went and rested.

The following day he felt no better and did not do much. He had the Sports well in hand, and there was no movement of troops. The day following that he felt queerer than ever, and jibbed at his breakfast. He went along to see the D.A.D.M.S., always a friend of his, who put a thermometer under his tongue, looked at it, shook it, looked at Dormer, gave him an aspirin, and advised him to go and lie down for a bit. On his way to his billet Dormer put his head into Q. office to tell the Sergeant-major where he was to be found if wanted. He was called by Colonel Vinyolles from the farther room. It was again full of people he considered (as rank counted for less than experience) to be his juniors. He could see something was "up." They were all highly amused except Vinyolles.

"I say, Dormer, I consider you let me down on this."

"What's the trouble?"

"Trouble! I've got a nice chit back, in reply to my saying 'the matter has attention.' They say that any further delay is 'inadmissible' and that they will be obliged to carry the matter higher."

"Let 'em!"

"Oh, that won't do at all. The General has seen this, and he wants to know what you mean by it."

"He ought to know by this time!"

"Captain Dormer!"

Of course he was wrong, but he felt rotten. It wasn't Vinyolles' fault. He pulled himself together.

"Sorry, sir. I mean that the case has been going on for nearly two years, and has certainly not been neglected. I think every one who counts is familiar with it."

He meant it for a snub for some of those chaps who were sitting there grinning. He saw his mistake in a moment. Vinyolles was as new as any of them, and naturally replied: "I'm afraid I have no knowledge of it. Perhaps you will enlighten me?"

"It must have been June, 1916, when we first received the claim. The late A.P.M., Major Stevenage, took it up as a matter of discipline, but on investigation considered that it was rather a case for compensation, as damage in billets. The French Mission insisted that an arrest must be made, and I have made every possible effort to trace the soldier responsible. But formations

change so quickly, during offensives especially, that it is impossible."

"I see. What exactly did he do, to cause such a rumpus?"

At the prospect of having to retell the whole story, Dormer got an impression that something was after him, exactly like the feeling of trying to get cover in a barrage, and wondering which moment would be the last. He put his hand to his head and found some one had pushed a chair against his knees. He sat down vaguely conscious of the D.A.D.M.S. standing near by.

"An officer of 469 T.M.B. was wounded and his servant was given two mules, sick or wounded, to lead. He got to the billet mentioned and seems to have taken a dislike for the horse-lines. He found one of those little memorial chapels that you often see, in the corner of the pasture, and knocked in the front of it to shelter the beasts. The farmer didn't like it and sent for the Mayor to make a *procès-verbal.* By the time the Mayor got there, the Battery was on the move again. It was about the time of one of those awkward little shows the Bosche put up to contain us during Verdun. The Battery had been badly knocked about, and the men were excited and

made some sort of a scene! The Mayor told his Deputy and his Deputy told some one at French G.H.Q. It all keeps going round in my head. I don't want to find the chap who did it. He's no worse than you or I. He was just making the best of the War, and I don't blame him. I blame it. You might as well crime the whole British Army."

What had he said? He fancied he had given the facts concisely, but was not sure of himself, his head felt so funny, and he was aware that people—he could no longer be sure who they were —Q. office seemed crowded—were tittering!—Some one else was talking now, but he was not interested. He rested his head on his hand and heard Vinyolles: "Well, Dormer, you go along to your billet, and we'll see what can be done!"

He got up and walked out. The D.A.D.M.S. was at his elbow, saying to him:

"Get into this ambulance, I'll run you across!" but he never got to his billet. He got into a train. He did not take much notice, but refused the stuff they wanted him to eat. After that he must have gone to sleep, but woke up, under a starlit sky, with an unmistakable smell of the sea. They were lifting him under a canvas

roof. Now, from the motion, he perceived he was at sea, but it did not seem greatly to matter. He was out of it, he had cut the whole disgusting show. He had done his bit, now let some one else take a turn.

Dormer had not been home on leave since early spring, and the leave that he got for convalescence, gave him not only some idea of the vast changes going on in England, while he, in France, had been engaged in the same old War, but a notion of changes that had gone on in that old War without his having perceived them. He was let loose from Hospital just before Christmas, at that unfortunate period when the public at home were still feeling the reaction from the Bell-ringing of Cambrai, were just learning the lengths to which the collapse of Russia had gone and were to be confronted with the probable repercussion of that collapse upon the prospects of the campaign in the West. There was no escaping these conclusions because his own home circumstances had so changed as to throw him back completely on himself. His father having died while he was in France, his mother had taken a post under one of the semi-official War organizations

that abounded. The old home in which he had grown up had been dispersed, and he found his only near relative in his native town was his sister, a teacher by profession, who had moved the remnants of the old furniture, and his and her own small belongings to a new house in one of the high, healthy suburbs that surrounded the old town. She was, however, busy all day, and he fell into the habit, so natural to anyone who has lived in a Mess for years, of dropping in at one of the better-class bars, before lunch, for an *apéritif*, and a glance at the papers. Here he would also pick up some one for a round of golf, which would keep him employed until tea-time, for he could not rid himself of the War-time habit of looking upon each day as something to be got through somehow, in the hopes that the morrow might be better.

These ante-prandial excursions were by far the closest contact he had had with anything like a normal, representative selection of his fellow-countrymen, since they and he had become so vitally altered from the easy-going, sport-loving England of pre-War, and he had to readjust his conception considerably. He soon grasped that there was a lot of money being made, and a lot of

khaki being worn as a cover for that process. There was plenty of energy, a good deal of fairly stubborn intention to go on and win, but a clear enough understanding that the War was not going to be won in the trenches. And when he had got over some little spite at this, his level habit of mind obliged him to confess that there was a good deal in it. There were many signs that those who held that view were right.

Sipping his drink, smoking and keeping his nose carefully in his newspaper, in those bars lighted by electric light, in the middle of the dark Christmas days, he listened and reflected. The offensives he had seen? How had they all ended? How did he say himself they always must end? Exactly as these chaps had made up their minds! Would he not see if there did not remain some relative who could get him one of these jobs at home, connected with supplying some one else with munitions? No, he would not. He understood and agreed with the point of view, but some very old loyalty in him would keep him in France, close up to the guns, that was the place for him. He had no illusions as to that to which he was returning. He knew that he had never been appointed to Divisional Staff, had merely

been attached. There was no "establishment" for him, and directly he had been sent down as sick, his place had been filled, some one else was doing "head housemaid" as he had been called, to young Vinyolles, and he, Dormer, would go shortly to the depôt of his regiment, from thence to reinforcement camp, and thus would be posted to any odd battalion that happened to want him. The prospect did not worry him so much as might have been supposed. He felt himself pretty adept at wangling his way along, and scrounging what he wanted, having had a fine first-hand experience of how the machinery worked. He did not want to go into the next offensive, it was true, but neither did he want the sort of job he had had, and even less did he want to be at Base, or in England. Boredom he feared almost as much as physical danger. Accustomed to having his day well filled, if he must go to War he wanted to be doing something, not nothing, which was apparently a soldier's usual occupation. But he did not feel his participation in the next offensive very imminent. He had heard them all talking about "Not fighting any more," and now here was Russia out of it and

America not yet in, and Peace might be patched up.

The most striking thing therefore that he learned was this new idea of the Bosche taking the initiative, and attacking again. A new army officer, his knowledge of the Western Front dated from Loos, and was of allied offensives only. He had never seen the earlier battles of Ypres, the retreat from Mons was just so much history to him. When he heard heated arguments as to which particular point the Bosche would select for their offensive, in France, or (so nervous were these people at home) in England even, he was astonished, and then incredulous. The level balance of his mind saved him. He had no superfluous imagination. He had never seen a German offensive, didn't want to, and therefore didn't think he would. As usual, the bar-parlour oracles knew all about it, gave chapter and verse, could tick off on their fingers how many German Divisions could be spared from the Eastern Front. He had heard it all before. He remembered how nearly the cavalry got through after Vimy, how Moorslede Ridge was to give us command of the country up to Courtrai, how Palestine

or Mespot were to open an offensive right in the Bosche rear, not to mention all the things these Russians had always been said to be going to do. This might be another of what the French so well called "Canards"—Wild Ducks. He would wait and see.

He was impressed in a different way by the accounts that now began to filter through, of what had been happening in Russia. Officers shot, and regiments giving their own views on the campaign. That was what happened when the Headless Man got loose! No doubt the Russians, from all he had heard, had suffered most, so far as individual human suffering went. And then, Russians were, to him, one of these over-brainy people. Had anyone acquainted with his ruminations taxed him to say if English people were under-brainy, he would have said no, not necessarily, but brainy in a different way. Left to himself he felt that all the opinions he had ever formed of the Russians were justified. Look at their Music. Some of it was pretty good, he admitted, but it was—awkward—beyond the reach of amateurs, in the main. This appeared to him, quite sincerely, to be a grave defect. He was conscious—more, he was proud—

of being an amateur soldier, and knowing himself to be modest, he did not fear any comparison between the actual results obtained by English amateurs like himself, and the far more largely professional armies of other countries. And now these over-brainy ones had gone and done it. He knew as well as anyone the hardships and dangers of soldiering, had experienced them, shared them with the ranks, in the trenches. Why even in this beastly Vanderlynden affair, it would have puzzled him to say if he were more sorry than glad that the private soldier had never been brought to Justice. But English—and even Frenchmen—as he had seen with his own eyes, if they mutinied, got over it, and went on. It was only people like the Russians that went and pushed things to their logical conclusion.

He had a hatred of that, being subconsciously aware that the logical conclusion of Life is Death. Naturally, from his upbringing and mental outlook, he had no sympathy with the alleged objects and achievements of the Russian Revolution. He could not see what anyone wanted with a new social order, and as for the domination of Europe by the Proletariat, if he understood it, he was all against it in principle. He was against it be-

cause it was Domination. That was precisely the thing that had made him feel increasingly antagonistic to Germany and German ideas. It had begun long ago, during brief continental holidays. He had met Germans on trains and steamers, in hotels and on excursions. He had grudged them their efficient way of sight-seeing, feeding and everything else. But he had grudged them most their size and their way of getting there first. If it had not been for that, he had a good deal more sympathy with them, in most ways, than with the French. Subsequently he had found Germans infringing on the business of his native town, selling cheaper, better-tanned hides than its tanners, more scientifically compounded manures than its merchants. Then they invaded politics and become a scare at election times. And after the false start of 1911, in 1914 they had finally kicked over the tea-table of the old quiet comfortable life. He did not argue about this. He had felt it simply, truly, directly. Under all the hot-air patriotism and real self-sacrifice of August, 1914, it had been this basic instinct which had made him and all his sort enlist. The Germans had asked for it, and they should darn-well have it. If they didn't they

would go on asking. They were after Domination.

That craze had started something that would be difficult now to stop. Dormer saw very well that other people besides Russians might find grievances and the same wrong-headed way of venting them. The Russians would probably go on with their propaganda, all over the world. The Germans, on the other hand, had probably set the Japanese off. And so we should go on, all the aristocratic classes calling for Domination by their sort, all the ultra-brainy democracies calling for their particular brand.

So when he was passed as fit and told to rejoin the depôt of his regiment, at a seaport town, he went without any panic fear of the future, German or otherwise. He went with a deep conviction that whatever happened, life had been cheapened and vulgarized. It was not by any means mere theory. He had seen what sort of a home he might hope to make after the Peace, with his mother or sisters, or if, conceivably, he married. Not a bad home, his job would always be there, and certain remnants of that bourgeois comfort that had grown up in all the old quiet streets of the provincial towns of England during the

nineteenth century, privileged, aloof from the troubles of the "continent," self-contained. But remnants only, not nearly enough. He and all his sort had been let down several pegs in the social scale. Without any narrow spite, or personal grievance, he felt that the Germans had caused this upset and the Russians had put the finishing stroke to it, made it permanent, as it were. He happened to be opposite the Germans in the particular encounter that was not yet ended, and he was able to draw upon an almost inexhaustible supply of obstinate ill-will.

He went to the depôt in its huts on a sandy estuary. It was commanded by a Major of the usual type, and no one knew better than Dormer how to keep on the right side of such a one. He was, of course, a Godsend to the Major. He had all the practical experience and none of the fussiness. He merely wanted the job finished. That suited the Major exactly, who didn't want it to finish in a hurry, but wanted even less to have to find ideas for training troops. Dormer, with his two and a half years in France, was the very man. He looked trustworthy. He was set to instructing the raw material, of which the camp was full. He disliked it intensely, but, as

always, took what was given him in his sober fashion and did his limited best with it. He was amazed to find such reserves of men still untouched. His own recollections of early 1915 were of camps filled with an eager volunteer crowd of all ages and conditions, who were astounded when it was suggested to them that certain of them ought to take a commission. Now he found that his sort went a different way, direct to O.T.C. or Cadet Corps. There was a permanence about the camp staff that he had never seen in the old days. But most of all he was impressed with the worn appearance of the camp. Thousand after thousand had passed through it, been drafted overseas, and disappeared. Thousand after thousand had followed. In the town and at the railway, there were no longer smiles and encouragement. People had got painfully used to soldiers, and from treating them as heroes, and then as an unavoidable and profitable incident, had come to regard them chiefly as a nuisance. He forgot how he had wondered if the men would stand it, he forgot how often he had heard the possibility of an early Peace discussed. He began to wonder now if people at home would stand it—the light-

less winter nights, the summer full of bombing, the growing scarcity of comforts, the queues for this, that, and the other, the pinch that every gradually depleted family was beginning to feel, as one after another of its members had to go. He had been so long out of all this, up against the actual warfare, glad enough of small privileges and of the experience that enabled him to avoid the more onerous duties, the worst sorts of want, that he only now began to realize what he had never grasped, in his few short leaves, that there was still quite a considerable, probably the greater portion of the nation, who did not share his view of the necessity of going on. Another avenue of speculation was opened to him. What if all the people at home made Peace behind the backs of the Armies. Yet, being Dormer, he did not submit to this home-grown philosophy. He just went on and did the next thing that his hand found to do.

Of one thing he became pretty certain. All these people at home had "got the wind up." He didn't know which were the worst, the lower middle class, who were beginning to fear invasion, as a form of damage to their shops and houses. He thought of those ten departments of France

that were either occupied by, or shot over, by the Germans. Or again the newspapers, with their scare-lines, their everlasting attempt to bring off this or that political coup. Or again the people in power, who were keeping this enormous number of troops in England, presumably to defend the beaches of the island from an armed landing. He had become, during the three years that had contained for him an education that he could not otherwise have got in thirty, a more instructed person.

An offensive was an offensive, could be nothing more or less. Every offensive had been a failure except for some local or temporary object, and in his opinion, always must be a failure. The idea of an offensive conducted across a hundred leagues of sea made him smile. It was hard enough to get a mile forward on dry land, but fancy the job of maintaining communications across the water! He attended enough drills to fill in the time, organized the football of the Brigade to his liking and let it go at that. At moments he was tempted to apply to be sent to France, at others to try and join one of these Eastern expeditions, Salonika, Palestine or Mespot. But the certainty of being more bored and of being farther than ever from

the only life he cared for, made him hesitate. He hesitated for two long months.

Then on the 21st March, he was ordered by telegram to proceed to France. He felt, if anything, a not unpleasant thrill. With all his care, he had not been able to dodge boredom altogether. The depôt camp had also been much too near the scenes of his pre-War life. He had gone home, as a matter of duty, for several week-ends and had always returned finely exasperated, it was so near to, and yet so far from home as he had pictured it, in his dreams. Now, here was an end to this Peace-time soldiering. The news, according to the papers, seemed pretty bad, but he remembered so well the awful scurry there was for reinforcements on the morning that the nature of the Second Battle of Ypres became known. This could not be so desperate as that was. Practically the whole of the rank and file in the depôt were under orders. He took jolly good care not to get saddled with a draft, and spent the night in London. People were in a rare stew there. He had a bath and a good dinner and left it all behind. He took a little more note of the traffic at the port of embarkation. On the other side, he found lorries waiting and went jolting and

jamming away up to Frecourt, forty miles. He rather approved. It looked as though our people were waking up.

At Corps reinforcement camp—a new dodge evidently—he got posted to a North Country battalion; and proceeded to try and find their whereabouts. He was told that they were going to Bray, but it took him some time to understand that they were falling back on that place. When, by chance, he hit upon the Division to which they belonged, they were on the road, looking very small, but intact and singing. He soon found plenty to do, for he grasped that practically the whole battalion was composed of reinforcements, and had only been together two or three days. They set to work at once to strengthen some half-completed entrenchments, but after two days were moved back again.

It was during those two days that he saw what he had never to that moment beheld, an army in retreat. The stream of infantry, artillery and transport was continuous—here in good formation, there a mere mass of walking wounded mixed up with civilians, as the big hospitals and the small villages of the district turned out before the oncoming enemy. He thought it rotten luck

on those people, many of whom had been in German hands until February, 1917, and had only had a twelvemonth in their small farms, living in huts, and had now to turn out before a further invasion. The bombardment was distinctly nasty, he never remembered a nastier, but as usual, the pace of the advance soon outdistanced the slow-moving heavy artillery, whose fire was already lessening. He had no feelings of sharp despair, for as he had foreseen, a modern army could not be crumpled up and disposed of. What he did now anticipate, was any amount of inconvenience. Amiens, he gathered, was uninhabitable, that meant many good restaurants out of reach. New lines of rail, new lateral communications would be necessary, that meant marching. Just when they had begun to get the trenches fairly reliable, they were entrained and sent wandering all round the coast. The wonderful spring weather broke with the end of March, as the weather always did, when it had ceased to be of any use to the Bosche, and had he been superstitious, he might have thought a good deal of that. It was in a cold and rainy April that he found himself landed on the edge of the coal-fields, behind a canal, with a slag

heap on one side of him, and a little wood on the other, amid an ominous quiet.

The company of which he had been given command was now about a hundred and fifty strong and he had done what little he could to equalize the four platoons. He had one officer with him, a middle-aged Lieutenant called Merfin, of no distinguishable social status, or local characteristics. The day when a battalion came from one town or corner of a county, under officers that were local personages in the civil life of its district, was long past. Dormer placed his second-in-command socially as music-hall, or pawnbroking, but the chap had been out before and had been wounded, and probably knew something of the job. The men were satisfactory enough, short, stumpy fellows with poor teeth, but exactly that sort of plainness of mind that Dormer appreciated. They would do all right. Perhaps a quarter of them had been out before, and the remainder seemed fairly efficient in their musketry and bombing, and talked pigeons and dogs in their spare time, when not gambling.

The bit of line they held was Reserve, a bridge-head over the canal, a strong point round a half-

demolished château in the wood, and some wet trenches to the right, where the next battalion joined on. Battalion Head-quarters was in a farm half a mile back. Dormer and Merfin improvised a Mess in the cellar of the Château, saw that the cooker in the stables was distributing tea, and let all except the necessary guards turn in. He had some machine gunners at the strong point, and across the canal were two guns, whose wagons had just been up with rations and ammunition. His own lot of rations came soon after and he told Merfin to take the first half of the night, and rolled himself in his coat to sleep.

As he lay there, listening to the scatter of machine-gun fire, and the mutter of officers' servants in the adjoining coal-hole, watching the candle shadows flicker on the walls that had been whitewashed, as the draught stirred the sacking over the doorway, his main thought was how little anything changed. Two and a half years ago he had been doing exactly the same thing, a few miles away, in the same sort of cellar, in front of an enemy with the same sort of advantage in ground and initiative, machine guns and heavy artillery. He was as far from beating the Germans as ever he had been. He supposed that

practically all the gains of 1916 and 1917 south of Arras had been lost. On the other hand, the Germans, so far as he could see, were equally far from winning. What he now feared was, either by prolonged War or premature Peace, a continuance of this sort of thing. And slowly, for he was as mild and quiet-mannered a man as one could find, his gorge began to rise. He began to want to get at these Germans. It was no longer a matter of principle, a feeling that it was his duty as it had been in the days when he enlisted, took a commission, and had come to France. He was no longer worrying about the injustice of the attack on Belgium or the danger of a Germany paramount in Europe. He had now a perfectly plain and personal feeling. But being Dormer, this did not make him cry out for a *sortie en masse* like a Frenchman, nor evolve a complicated and highly scientific theory as to how his desire was to be realized. The French and Portuguese who fought beside him would have found him quite incomprehensible. The Germans actually invented a logical Dormer whom they had to beat, who was completely unlike him. If he had any ideas as to what he was going to do, they amounted to a quiet certainty that once the

enemy came away from his heavy and machine guns, he, Dormer, could do him in.

So he went on with the next thing, which was to turn over and sleep. He woke sitting bolt upright, to the sound of two terrific crashes. One was right over his head. The candle had been blown out, and as he struggled out of the cellar, barking his shins and elbows, he was aware that the faint light of the sky was obscured by a dense cloud all round him. Instinctively he pulled up his gas mask, but the sound of falling masonry and the grit he could taste between his lips, reassured him. It was a cloud of brick dust. Across the canal, the barrage was falling on the front lines with the thunder of a waterfall. The Bosche had hit the Château, and if he were not mistaken, had put in another salvo, somewhere near by. At the gate of the little park-like garden he ran into a figure he recognized for Merfin, by the red light of the battle, just across the canal.

"What is it?"

"Aw—they've knocked in the bridge!"

"Every one standing-to?"

"Can't help 'emselves."

They went to look at the damage. The bridge was a small, one vehicle affair, with steel lattice

sides, and an asphalt roadway. The bridge piers at the near end had been blown away, and the whole had settled down some four or five feet, on to the mud of the tow-path.

"Can you get across?"

"Aw—yes—easy!"

"Better get across and wait a bit!"

He himself went back to find up his stretcher bearers, who, he had always noticed, wanted an order to get them in motion. The guard on the bridge was dead so far as he could see, but some one was shouting, behind, at the Château.

He found the C.S.M. with two men digging out the servants whose coal-cellar had been blocked. One of them was badly crushed, but his own man only shaken. Then there were horses on the road. Gunners, trying to get their teams up to the advanced guns. Hopeless, of course. Then came a runner from battalion. Send Merfin with two platoons. He saw to that, and rearranged his depleted company. It took some time. The barrage appeared to be creeping nearer. The ground shook with the continuous concussion and whiffs of gas were more and more noticeable, but the heavier stuff was already falling farther to the rear. Then came a runner

from across the bridge. There was a crowd on the road. Dormer went and found just what he expected. Walking wounded and those who wanted to be treated as such. He sorted them out, directing the former down the road to the dressing station, and setting the others to dig. If he had got to hang on to this place, and he supposed he had, he meant to have some cover. The stream of people across the broken bridge increased. Trench mortars and machine gunners, platoons of his own regiment. The Bosche was "through" on the left, and they were to come back behind the canal. The barrage died out, to confirm this. The machine-gun fire came nearer and nearer.

In the cold grey light of a wet April dawn, a tin-helmeted figure dashed up on a borrowed motor-cycle. It was the Brigade Major. What had Dormer got? He heard and saw, and took a platoon and all the sundries. His last words were: "Hang on here, whatever you do!" Dormer heard the words without emotion. He realized that it meant that he was expected to gain time. He got hold of his Sergeant, and overhauled the rations and ammunition. They were

not too badly off, and the cooker lay stranded in the stable yard. That meant hot water, at least. He took a turn round the place. The Château grounds had once been wired as part of some forgotten scheme of defence of 1915 or early 1916. That was all right On the other hand, the "bridge-head"—a precious half-boiled concoction—was full of gas and the barrier on the road blown away.

He got his few men out of it, with their several casualties and started them carting brick rubble from the dilapidations of the Château to make an emplacement for a machine gun on the near side of the bridge. He stood looking at the road by which the Bosche must come—a mere lane that led from one of the neighbouring coal-pits, and was used, he imagined, for transport of coal that was required locally. It meandered out of sight, among low fenceless fields, until the shallow undulations of the ground hid it. In the distance was the steamy reek of last night's battle, but nothing that moved, amid the silence broken only by long-distance shots, and fusillade somewhere on the left. Then, down that road he saw a party advancing, led by an officer. There was no doubt

that they wore khaki. He waited by the bridge for them, and shouted directions to them how to cross. He got an answer:

"Hallo, you old devil, what are you doing?"

It was that Kavanagh. There had been an advanced signal exchange, and he had gone to bring his men in. They were tired, hungry and disgusted, but Kavanagh had the jauntiness of old. He wasn't going back to Division, he was going to stay with dear old Dormer, and see this through. Dormer thought a moment, then said: "All right."

"All right. I should think so. I don't suppose I could catch Division, even on a motor-byke. They must be nearly at Calais. It's all rot. The Bosche are done!"

"Are they?"

"Sure. What are they waiting for now?"

"Bringing up their artillery?"

"That won't blow the water out of the canal."

"Possibly not. But we may as well have some food while it's possible."

"You old guts. Always eating!"

"Yes, when I can. Aren't you?"

"Now, Dormer. You know me better than that. Glory is my manna."

"Will you take cold bully and tea with it?" asked Dormer as they dropped into the cellar.

Kavanagh made no objection, and they ate in silence, fast, for ten minutes. Then they saw the men were being fed, and relapsed, in their hiding-place, into pipes, and whisky out of Kavanagh's flask.

"How did you get into this show?" Dormer asked.

"The Division—your old Division, my boy, left me here to hand over! They might have spared themselves the trouble. But I'd got a most lovely scheme of lateral communication. Corps gave me a lot of sweet words about it. I suppose I shall get the M.C. Now the silly old Hun has gone and blown it all to bits. What about you?"

"You know I got wrong and was sent home sick."

"I heard all that. It was about that Vanderlynden affair, wasn't it?"

"It was!"

"Well, you've no idea what a sensation you created. Vinyolles got simply wet behind the ears with it. Some French Deputy said, after the Somme show, that English troops did more dam-

age to France than to Germany. Of course every one in Divisional H.Q. has changed in the last few months. They all established an alibi or Habeas Corpus or something. It was one of the things that made the French Press go for unity of command! You were a boon to them!"

"I wish them joy of the business. I don't know why you mix up with it."

"Why, it was your pet show, wasn't it?"

"It got fathered on to me because I could understand what it was about."

"Yes, you told Vinyolles, didn't you?"

"The ignorant brute asked me."

"I know. He's all fresh. I find him trying also. Well, he knows all about it now."

"Tell you the truth, I've no idea what I said, Kavanagh! I was feeling queer!"

"Vinyolles thought you'd gone potty."

"He wasn't far wrong."

"He said you told him the whole British Army was guilty of the Kerrime at Vanderlynden's!"

It was the first time Dormer had heard it called that.

"Well, in a sense, so they are."

"In a sense, War is a foolish business!"

"I thought you liked it?"

"I was trying to talk like you——"

Before Dormer could reply, the sacking over the door was lifted, by Dormer's Sergeant.

"Cop'l Arbone is back, sir!"

"Very good. Did he get in touch with the Major?"

"He only found a Lewis-gun section, sir. The Major moved most of the men along the canal, where there's more trouble!'

"All right!"

"Well, I suppose I may as well go and have a look at my lot." Kavanagh stretched himself. "I told 'em to hunt round and see if they could get this place wired up!"

"Umpteenth Corps ought to have thought of that, long ago!"

"Did you ever know Corps think of anything."

While Kavanagh was so engaged, Dormer took a turn round the various guards and posts he had established. There appeared to be fair cover from view, and even from small-arm and field-gun fire. Of course when the Bosche really wanted to get the place, nothing Dormer and Kavanagh and some forty men could do would stop it. In coming round to the stables behind the Château he found his Sergeant with two men, laboriously

trundling on a hand cart what he soon verified to be slabs of marble. What would they think of next? The explanation was, "There was a champion bathroom, sir, an' I thought we could set up our Lewis better with these!"

When Kavanagh saw what was going on, he laughed.

"More damage in billets, Dormer!"

"Well, the stuff will be smashed up anyhow, won't it?"

"Two blacks don't make a white. I understand why you told Vinyolles the whole army was guilty. You're doing just what your friend did about his mules."

"Why will you drag in that beastly business? This has nothing in common with it."

"To the common all things are common. You tell the owner of the Château that when he finds out."

Dormer was going to say "He won't find out!" but refrained. He disliked arguing. This seemed a particularly bad argument. Also, at that moment, a Lewis gun began, just below. Then another. He went to the garden wall, and peered out. Nothing visible, as usual. He thought of all the battle pictures he had ever seen.

The prancing horses, the gay uniforms, the engrossing action of figures that pointed muzzle or bayonet at each other, that wielded sword or lance. Here he was, an incident in one of the biggest battles in the world. All he could see was neglected arable, smashed buildings, a broken bridge and a blocked by-road, all shrouded in steamy vapour. He made out that it was the Lewis opposite the end of the bridge that was firing. He crawled along the gully that had been dug from the Château gate to the roadway, and so to the emplacement by the step-off of the bridge. The Corporal in charge of the section turned to him.

"Got 'im, sir!"

"What is it?"

"Bosche in the ditch, under them bushes!"

Dormer waited a moment, but nothing happened. He crawled back, and sent his Sergeant round to see that every one was under cover. Back in the cellar he found Kavanagh, and told him.

"I know. Once more into the breach!"

"It's not poetry, Kavanagh. This is the start. Once they find we're stopping them here, they'll shift us, you may bet!"

"I shouldn't wonder. My lot are trying to get into touch with Brigade. They're running a line back behind the wood. There's no one on our left, as far as can be found."

"Must be some one."

"Why should there be? Brigade have probably moved by this time."

"Ah, well, can't be helped."

No use telling the chap that it was all useless. He just sat down and lit his pipe. He perceived clearly enough that they were being sacrificed—just left there to hold the Bosche up for a few hours, while the Division went back.

During the day there was sporadic machine gunning. The Bosche was feeling his way for crossing the canal, but had found it far less easy than in the sectors farther north. Tolerably certain that the main attack would come at dawn, Dormer and Kavanagh got what rest they could, though proper sleep was out of the question. Their servants had found a well-upholstered sofa, and a superior brass bedstead, which now adorned the cellar, causing Kavanagh to gibe about damage in billets. Their vigil was lightened by the sounds of song from the stables where such men as they had set apart as reserves were lodged.

"Old soldiers never die,
They only fade away."

to a well-known hymn tune, made Dormer home-sick, but delighted Kavanagh.

"Listen to that!"

"I can't help it, unless I send out and stop them."

"Never, man, never stop men who can sing at such a moment. It means philosophy and courage!"

"It means foolishness and rum!"

"Dormer, I fear you are no born leader!"

"No, of course I wasn't."

"But you've got to lead men now, and lead 'em to victory."

"I don't mind much so long as I lead 'em to Peace!"

"Yes, but don't you see, mere Peace will mean Revolution!"

"I don't believe it. I saw that affair at Étaples. I saw the trouble among the French troops in May. Those chaps prefer to take orders from you and me rather than from their own sort."

"How do you account for Russia, then?"

"I can't. But it's an object lesson rather than an example, I should say."

"You used not to talk like that. You used to say that the men wouldn't stand it."

"I've lived and learned!"

"Both, I am sure."

"You needn't be so superior. No one knew what any of this would be like until it was tried. We've something to go by, now! This War depends on turning a crank. The side that goes on turning it efficiently the longer will win. Our chaps look like lasting!"

"So do the Bosche. No, Dormer, you're all wrong——"

At that moment a fresh burst of song came from the stables. A Cockney voice to a waltz tune:

> "Orl that I wawnt is larve,
> Orl that I need is yew——"

"There," cried Kavanagh, his voice rising into his excited croak. "That's what we want!"

Dormer did not reply. With dusk came a few long-range shots, gradually broadening and deepening into a bombardment towards dawn. Both of them had to be out and about all night. They

had several casualties, and the whole place reeked with gas. As the grey light of another day began to change the texture of the shadows, movement was discernible about the road. It was their chance and with a higher heart and the feeling of relief, they were able to let loose the Lewis guns, which they had managed to save intact. For more than an hour, Dormer crawled from one to the other, seeing that they did not overheat or jam, for the fact that they were killing Germans pleased him. Then there was a slackening of fire on both sides.

They waited and the suspense from being irksome, became tolerable. There was a good deal of noise each side of them, and Dormer began to wonder if his detachment were surrounded, especially as the servants whom he had sent back to get into touch with Brigade, had not returned. It was a dull rainy afternoon prematurely dark, and the rain as it increased, seemed to beat down the gunning, as water quenches a fire. He must have been in that half-waking state that often superimposed on sleeplessness and the awful din, when he was thoroughly roused by trampling in the trees round the Château. He called to Kavanagh but got no reply. Then there was a

pushing and scrambling at the wall behind the stable, and English cavalrymen came swinging over it. Dormer and Kavanagh were relieved, and were shortly able to hand over and prepare to march their command back to rejoin their Division, which, depleted by four weeks of continual mauling, was being taken out of the line.

The battle was by no means over. They next went in farther north, and Dormer had the queer experience of going into trenches where Corps H.Q. had been, of billeting in rooms where Major-Generals had slept. Gradually he became aware of lessening tension, reduced shelling, and slackened machine-gun fire, but it was the end of May before he found, when sent to raid an enemy post, that there was no one there. He had been right after all. The German offensive also had failed. Anticlimax was the rule of the War. He was glad that he had parted from Kavanagh, who had gone back to his proper job with his Division, goodness knew where. He felt that the fellow would remind him that for several hours while they lay together in those scratched-out trenches round that little Château by the canal, he had given up hope. He need not have bothered. If the Bosche could not win on that day,

he never would. Slowly now the British lines were creeping forward. Then he found American troops behind him.

It was during this phase of things that he found himself upon familiar ground. Except on Kavanagh's lips, he had not heard of the crime at Vanderlynden's since before Christmas. It was now September. Here he was, detrained and told to march to Hondebecq. He passed what had been Divisional Head-quarters in 1916 and noticed the shell-holes, the open, looted, evacuated houses. He passed along the road which he and Major Stevenage had traversed all those years ago. The Brigade were in Divisional Reserve, and were quartered in a string of farms just outside the village. He looked at the map squares attentively, but on the larger scale map he found it actually marked Ferme l'Espagnole. Being Dormer, he just saw to the billeting of his company and then learned that the Battalion Headquarters were located at the Vanderlynden's, and had no difficulty in finding good reason to walk over there after tea.

The place was not much changed. It was soiled, impoverished, battered by War, but the German advance, which had stopped dead a few

miles short of it, had been spent by the time it reached its limits in this sector, and had early been pushed back. Trenches had been dug and camouflage erected all round the place, but it had not suffered damage except by a few long-distance shots, the routine of trench warfare had never reached it. In the kitchen, darkened by the fact that the glass was gone from the windows, which were blinded with aeroplane fabric, stood the familiar figure of Mademoiselle Vanderlynden. He asked for the Colonel, and was civilly directed to the parlour on the other side of the door. Not a word of recognition, hardly a second glance. He did not know if he were sorry or glad. He would have felt some relief to hear that the claim that had caused all that trouble had been settled. But he did not know what he might bring down upon his head by inquiry and held his tongue. His business with the Colonel was the usual regimental routine, nominal and numerical rolls, reinforcements and indents, training and movements. It did not take long. On his way out he passed the kitchen door and said just:

"Good night, Mademoiselle!"

"Good night, M'sieu!" And then calmly:

"They are going to pay us for the damage to *La Vierge!*"

"I am glad to hear it."

"I thought you would like to know. It has been a long time."

"Yes, a long time. I hope it will soon be settled."

"Ah, not yet. I know these offices at Boulogne! They have a good deal to pay for, no doubt!"

"No doubt. Good night, Mademoiselle!"

"Good night, *mon capitaine*."

Walking back to his billet, he had once more that sensation of escape. Was he really going to get away from that business, this time, for ever? True, Mademoiselle Vanderlynden seemed little enough inclined to be vindictive. He could not help feeling that her view of the affair was after all reasonable and just. She bore no malice, she wanted things put right. Money would do it. She was going to get the money, or so she seemed to think. She had no animus against the man who had broken a piece of her property. She had neither animus against nor consideration for himself, the representative of the British Army, who

had so signally failed to hasten the question of compensation. She took it all as part of the War, and she was seeing it correctly. It was the British Army that had done it. Her home, where she was working so peacefully in 1914, had become first a billet, then all but a battlefield. The Crime at Vanderlynden's was the War, nothing more nor less. That was exactly what he felt about it. No damage had been done to any furniture or valuables that he owned, but he had still to get out of it with his body intact, and resume the broken thread of existence, where it had been snapped off, all those four years ago. True he had not been badly paid, but he had taken a considerable risk—it was much more dangerous to be an officer than a private, more dangerous to be a private than a civilian. She had gauged the whole thing correctly, right down to the necessarily slow and complicated process of getting it adjudicated by some set of fellows down by the coast, who ran these things off by the hundred and had a whole set of rules that had to be complied with. He turned at the end of the farm road and took a look back at the old place. There were worse billets than the Spanish Farm and people more awkward to deal with than the

Vanderlyndens. In the Somme he had come across farms where they charged you for the water and people who removed everything right down to the bedsteads. Vanderlynden had only wanted to be paid for what was wantonly damaged. They were French, you couldn't expect them to be sympathetic about other people's mules. What a queer world it was; he would never have suspected all the crotchets that human nature could present, had he not been thrust nose-foremost into this infernal show.

All his philosophy forsook him, however, on entering the billet where his company was lodged. The woman had been selling not merely beer, which was connived at, but spirits to the men. Two of them had got "tight" and had been arrested, and he would have them up before him in the morning. Then there would be the question as to where she got the spirits from, whether some Quartermaster-sergeant had been making away with the rum, or whether she had induced some one to buy it for her at the Expeditionary Force Canteen. It all came back to the same thing. Men kept under these conditions too long.

No one had been more surprised than Dormer, when the Allied Armies took up the initiative

again in July, and appeared to keep it. With a lugubrious satisfaction he found himself retracing the advances in the Somme district of 1916. It was an ironical comment on his hard-earned War-wisdom, two years devoted to doing precisely the same thing at precisely the same place. Of course, we had learned some lessons, but his estimate of one hundred and eighty years was still too small. But when the movement became perpetual and he found himself on ground he no longer recognized, among villages that showed all the signs of methodical German occupation, he began to wonder. A slight wound in the forearm threw him out of touch for a week or two, and when he went back, he found himself in a more northern sector again, and for the first time found cavalry in front of him. It suited him all right, he didn't want to have the job of bombing out little nests of machine gunners, that marked each step in the line of advance. His feelings were pretty generally shared. Men began to ask themselves whether there was any glory in being knocked out at the moment of victory. When his battalion was again obliged to move in advance of the cavalry, against obstacles which, although always evacuated, were out of the sphere

of cavalry tactics, he found for the first time a definite unwillingness among his command to obey orders in any but the most perfunctory manner.

He had sufficient sense to see that it was very natural. In the early days the job had been to keep men under cover, to avoid useless and wasteful casualties. The lesson had been learned at length with a thoroughness that he could never have instilled. The old, old boast of the Territorial Colonel who had first enlisted him, and whose tradition was actually of pre-Territorial days, from the period of the Volunteers of before the Boer War, was far better founded than he had ever supposed. He had been inclined to scoff when he had heard the old boy talk: "Our motto was Defense not Defiance!" He did not scoff now. It was deeply, psychologically true. The army that had survived was an army that had been made to fight without much difficulty, while its back was to the sea, with the knowledge that trenches lost meant worse, if possible, conditions of existence, and it was moved by some rags of sentiment, as to holding what one had got; an army which displayed all the slowly aroused, almost passive pugnacity of the English working

class, so docile, yet so difficult to drive out of a habit of mind, or an acquired way of living. They had no real imperialism in them, none of the high-falutin' Deutchland über Alles, none of the French or Italian bitter revengefulness, nor peasant passion for acquisition. The Rhine had never figured in their primary school education. They had no relatives groaning under Austrian or German domination—no rancorous feelings bred from the attempt to force alien language or unassimilated religious forms down their throats.

He had always regarded the boast about an Englishman's House being his Castle as so much claptrap. He knew by daily experience of business, that any Englishman was goverened by economic conditions. Religious and racial tyranny were so far removed from the calculations of all his sort, and all above and below it, that the very terms had ceased to have any meaning. This War had no effect on the lightly borne if real tyranny of England, the inexorable need to get a permanent job if possible and keep it, with constant anxiety as to the tenure of one's lodging, and the prospect of old age. These fellows who fell in with blank unmeaning faces, in which there was no emotion, and who marched with the same

old morose jokes, and shyly imitated the class standards which he and those like him handed down to them from the fount of English culture and fashion in the Public Schools, had done, what they had promised to do, or had (the late comers) been conscripted to do. They had engaged or been called up for duration. That was a typically English slogan for a European War. Their Anglia Irridenta lay in the football fields and factories, the music-halls and seaside excursions that they talked of, and now hoped to see once again. Their Alsace Lorraine lay in the skilled occupations or soft jobs that women or neutrals had invaded. When he listened to their talk in billets, and occasionally caught some real glimpse of them, between their mouth-organ concerts, and their everlasting gamble at cards, it was of the keen Trades Unionists who were already talking of purging this, that or the other skilled industry from all the non-union elements that had been allowed to flow into it, behind their backs, while they were chasing Fritz across this b—— country, where Belgium, France, or Luxembourg were simply "billets," and the goal was "dear old Blighty"—behind them, over the Channel, not in front, still ringed about by German trenches.

There were elements of hesitation, he noticed, in all the Allies. The French felt they had done much too much, and wanted to be back at their farms and little shops. The Belgians wanted to march into their country without the tragic necessity of knocking flat all its solidly built, hard-working little towns. All three nations shared the inevitable sense that grew upon men with the passage of years, of the mechanical nature of the War. Thus the cavalry, where the greatest proportion of regular soldiers lingered, were still keen on exploiting their one chance. The artillery, buoyed up by the facilities that their command of transport gave them, fired away their now all abundant ammunition. The machine gunners, containing some proportion of picked men, and able to feel that they could easily produce some noticeable effect with their weapon, were still game. But the mass of infantry, tired enough of the bomb and the rifle, and probably unfitted by generations of peace, for any effective use of the bayonet, were rapidly adopting the attitude, unexpressed as always with the humbler Englishman, of "Let the gunners go on if they like. We don't mind!"

On a grey November morning, Dormer went

to his billet in the suburb of a manufacturing town. It was the most English place he had set eyes on in all his three years. It was not really suburban, very nearly, not quite. There was no garden before the door, it was close to the factories and workshops where the wealth that had built it was made, instead of being removed a decent mile or so. In fact, it just lacked the proper pretentiousness. Its owner had made money and was not in the least ashamed of admitting it, was rather prone to display the fact and his house looked like it. It was a villa, not a château. It was the home of a successful manufacturer who did not want in the least to be taken for a country gentleman. He, poor fellow, had been called up and promptly killed, and his home, with its stained-glass windows, expensive draping and papering, clumsy if efficient sanitation, was inhabited only by his widow.

Dormer thought there could not be in the world any person so utterly beaten. Broken-hearted, exposed during four years to considerable bodily privation, being in the occupied area, she was no Mademoiselle Vanderlynden of the Army zone that Dormer knew, making a bold front against things. She was a delicate—had been probably

a pretty woman—but it was not from any of her half-audible monosyllabic replies that Dormer was able to discover to what sort of a country he had come. A little farther down the street was the factory, long gutted by the Germans and used as a forage store, where his company were billeted. The old caretaker in the time-keeper's cottage, told Dormer all that was necessary, and left him astonished at the moderation of tone and statement, compared with the accounts of German occupation given by the Propagandist Press. Possibly, it was because he addressed the old man in French—or because he had never parted with his English middle-class manners—or because the old fellow was nearly wild with delight at being liberated. This was what Dormer heard:

"Enter, my Captain. It is a Captain, is it not, with three stars? The insignia of Charles Martel!" (Here wife and daughter joined in the laugh at what was obviously one of the best jokes in father's repertory.) "You will find that the Bosches removed everything, but that makes less diffiulty in the workshop. You have only to divide the floor space between your men. I know. I was a corporal in the War of 'Seventy. Ah! a bad business, that, but nothing to what we

have now supported. You will do well to make a recommendation to your men not to drink the water of the cistern. The Bosches have made beastliness therein. Ah! You have your own watercart? That is well done, much better than we others used to have, in Algeria. It is always wise to provide against the simple soldier, his thoughts have no connection. You say you are accustomed to Germans and their mannerisms? I do not wonder. We too, as you may judge, have had cause to study them. I will tell you this, my Captain, the German is no worse than any other man, but he has this mania for Deutschland über Alles. It comes from having been a little people and weak, and so often conquered by us others. So that to give him some idea of himself, since he cannot invent a culture like us other French, he must go to put all above below and make a glory of having a worse one. That shows itself in his three great faults—he has no sentiment of private property—what is others' is his. He must be dirtier than a dog in his habits—witness our court-yard—and he has to make himself more brute than he really is. You see therefore, he has stripped the factory, and even our little lodging, down to my daughter's sewing-

machine, and the conjugal bed of mother and myself. You see also, that we had our grandchildren, our dog Azor, our cat Titi. Now many of the Bosches who lodged here were certainly married and had their little ones and domestic animals. Yet if they found a child or a beast playing in the entry when they entered or left, they must give a kick of the foot, a cut with the riding-whip. Not from bad thoughts, I assure you. It is in their code, as it is in that of us others, English and French, to lift the hat, to make a salutation. The officers are the worst, because in them the code is stronger. For the German simple soldier, I have respect. They sang like angels!" (Here the old man quavered out the first bars of:

"Ein feste Bourg ist unser Gott."

Dormer wanted to get away, but could scarcely forbear to listen when the daughter broke in:

"But Papa, recount to the officer the droll trick you played upon those who came to demolish the factory!"

"Ah, yes. Place yourself upon a chair, my officer, and I will tell you that. Figure to yourself that these Bosches, as I have explained, were not so bad as one says in the papers. They had

orders to do it. I know what it is. I have had orders, in Algeria, to shoot Arabs. It was not my dream, but I did it. I will explain to you this.

"It was the day on which they lost the ridge. One heard the English guns, nearer and nearer. Already there were no troops in the factory, nothing but machine gunners, always retreating. A party of three came here with machinery in a box. One knew them slightly, since they also had billeted here. They were not dirty types, on the contrary, honest people. Sapper-miners, they were; but this time one saw well that they had something they did not wish to say. They deposit their box and proceed to render account of the place. They spoke low, and since we have found it better to avoid all appearance of wishing to know their affairs, we did not follow them. Only, my daughter had a presentiment. Woman, you know, my officer, it is sometimes very subtle. She put it in her head that these would blow up the factory. She was so sure that I lifted the cover of their box and looked in. It was an electric battery and some liquids in phials. I had no time to lose. I placed myself at the gate and ran as fast as I can to where they

were, in the big workshop. I am already aged more than sixty. My days for the race are over. Given also that I was experiencing terrible sentiments—for you see, while we keep the factory there is some hope we may be able to work when the War is finished, but if it is blown up, what shall we others go and do—I was all in a palpitation, by the time I reached them. I cried: 'There they go!'

" 'Who goes?' they asked.

" 'The cavalry,' I cried.

"They ran to the entry, and seeing no one, they feared that they were already surrounded. I saw them serpentine themselves from one doorway to another all down the street. The moment they were lost to sight I flung their box into the big sewer!"

Dormer billeted his company in the factory. He did not fear shell-fire that night. He himself slept in a bed at the villa. It was the first time he had left the night guard to a junior officer. In the morning, he paraded his company, and proceeded, according to plan, to await the order to move. The days were long gone by when a battalion was a recognizable entity, with a Mess at

which all the officers saw each other once a day. Depleted to form Machine Gun Companies, the truncated battalions of the end of the War usually worked by separate companies, moving independently. There was some desultory firing in front, but his own posts had seen and heard nothing of the enemy. About nine he sent a runner to see if his orders had miscarried. Reply came, stand to, and await developments. He let his men sit on the pavement, and himself stood at the head of the column, talking with the two youngsters who commanded platoons under him. Nothing happened. He let the men smoke. At last came the order: "Cease fire."

When he read out the pink slip to his subordinates, they almost groaned. Late products of the last up-to-date O.T.C.s of England, they had only been out a few months and although they had seen shell-fire and heavy casualties, yet there had always been a retreating enemy, and fresh ground won every week. The endless-seeming years of Trench Warfare they had missed entirely. The slow attrition that left one alone, with all one's friends wounded or killed, dispersed to distant commands or remote jobs, meant nothing to them. They had been schoolboys when

Paschendaele was being contested, Cadets, when the Germans burst through the Fifth Army. They wanted a victorious march to Berlin.

Dormer read the message out to the company. The men received the news with ironical silence. He had the guards changed, and the parade dismissed, but confined to billets. He heard one of his N.C.O.s say to another: "Cease fire! We've got the same amount of stuff on us as we had two days ago!"

It made him thoughtful. Ought he to crime the chap? Why should he? Had the Armistice come just in time? If it hadn't come, would he have been faced with the spectacle of two armies making peace by themselves, without orders, against orders, sections and platoons and companies simply not reloading their rifles, machine gunners and Trench Mortars not unpacking their gear, finally even the artillery keeping teams by the guns, and the inertia gradually spreading upwards, until the few at the top who really wanted to go on, would have found the dead weight of unwillingness impossible to drag? The prospect, though curious, was not alarming. In a country so denuded and starved, one could keep discipline by the simple expedient of withholding rations.

He had already seen, a year before at Étaples, the leaderless plight of all those millions of armed men, once they were unofficered. He was not stampeded by panic, and his inherited, inbred honesty, bade him ask himself: "Why shouldn't they make Peace themselves?" The object that had drawn all these men together was achieved. The invasion of France was at an end, that of Belgium a matter of evacuation only. "Cease fire." It almost began to look like an attempt to save face. Was it the same on the German side too?

In the afternoon he proposed to walk over to Battalion H.Q. and have a word with the Colonel. He knew quite well he should find the other company commanders there. Naturally every one would want to get some idea of what was to be expected under these totally unprecedented circumstances. He was met at the door of his billet by a message from the youngster he had left in charge. He had got a hundred and forty prisoners.

Dormer went at once. He could see it all before he got there. All along the opposite side of the street, faultlessly aligned and properly "at ease" were men in field grey. At either end of the line stood a guard of his own company, and

not all Dormer's pride in the men he had led with very fair success, with whose training and appearance he had taken great pains, could prevent his admitting to himself that the only point at which his lot could claim superiority was in a sort of grumpy humour. The machinery of War had conquered them less entirely than it had conquered the Germans.

In the little time-keeper's box, turned into the company office, he found a tall, good-looking man, who immediately addressed him in perfect English, giving the rank of Feld Webel, the quantity and regiment of his party and adding: "I surrender to you, sir." Dormer gave instructions that the party should be marched to Brigade Head-quarters. He wanted to send some report as to the capture, but his subordinate replied: "We didn't capture 'em. They just marched up the street. The post at the bridge let 'em through." Dormer let it go at that, and having seen the street cleared, he walked over to see his Colonel, who was billeted in a big school in a public park. His story was heard with that sort of amusement that goes with the last bottle of whisky, and the doubt as to when any more will

be obtainable. The Adjutant said: "Simply gave 'emselves up, did they?"

But the Captain commanding C Company, a man of about Dormer's own sort and service, voiced Dormer's thought.

"I believe, in another week, we'd have had both sides simply laying down their arms."

"Oh, nonsense, soon stop that!" The Colonel spoke without real conviction. He had to say that officially.

With regard to the object for which he had come, Dormer found every one in his own difficulty. No one knew what was to happen, except that arrangements were already on foot for enormous demobilization camps. But the immediate steps were not even known at Brigade. Every one, of course, aired some pet idea, and were interrupted by noise outside, shouts and cries, the sound of marching, and orders given in German. The room emptied in a moment. The park was at one end of the town, and abutted on the smaller streets of artisans' dwellings that in every town of the sort, goes by the name of Le Nouveau Monde. This quarter had apparently emptied itself into the park, to the number of some hun-

dreds, mostly people of over military age, or children, but one and all with those thin white faces that showed the long years of insufficient and unsuitable food, and the spiritual oppression that lay on "occupied" territory. They were shouting and shaking their fists round the compact formation of Dormer's prisoners, who had just been halted, in front of the house. The N.C.O. in charge had been ordered by Brigade to bring them back. A chit explained the matter: "Prisoners taken after 11.0 a.m. to be sent back to their own units, on the line of retreat."

The Feld Webel enlightened the Colonel's mystification: "We refuse to obey the order, sir. Our regiment is twenty miles away. All the peasants have arms concealed. We shall just be shot down."

It was a dilemma. Dormer could not help thinking how much better the Feld Webel showed up, than his own Colonel. The latter could not shoot the men where they stood. Nor could he leave them to the mercies of the natives. How difficult War became with the burden of civilization clogging its heels. The first thing to do was obviously to telephone to the A.P.M. for police. In the meantime a French Liaison Officer made

a speech, and Dormer grinned to hear him. Fancy apologizing for the War. But what else could the fellow do? He did it well, considering. The crowd quieted, thinned, dispersed. The police arrived, and had a discussion with the Adjutant. Still no conclusion. The Feld Webel strode up and down in front of his men, master of the situation. At length, some one had an idea. Six lorries rolled up in the dark, an interpreter was put on board, and the party moved off in the November dusk. The Commander of C Company and Dormer left H.Q. together. Parting at the corner that separated their scattered companies, they both exclaimed together:

"What a War!" and burst out laughing.

It was perhaps, to a certain degree, Dormer's fault, that during the remainder of November he became conscious of a dreary sense of anti-climax. No doubt he was that sort of person. The emergencies of the War had considerably overstrained his normal powers, which he had forced to meet the need. The need had ceased, and he had great difficulty in goading himself up to doing the bare necessary routine of Company office parades. He managed to avoid being

sent up to the Rhine, and even secured a reasonable priority in demobilization, but beyond this there was nothing for it but to "continue the motion" of waiting for the next thing to happen.

His principal job was to extract from an unwilling peasantry, enough ground for football. How often did he go to this farm and that village shop, with his best manner, his most indirect approach, liberal orders for any of the many commodities that could be brought, and in the last resort, cheerful payment of ready money out of his own pocket in order to obtain a grudging leave to use this or that unsuitable meadow, not to the extent that the game of football demanded, but to the extent that the small proprietors considered to be the least they could make him accept for the most money that he could possibly be made to pay.

Then, in the long dark evenings, there was the job of keeping the men away from the worse sorts of *estaminet.* His own abilities, limited to singing correctly the baritone part of Mendelssohn's Sacred Works, or Sullivan's humorous ones, was not of any practical service. What was wanted was the real star comic, the red-nosed man with

improbable umbrella, the stage clergyman with his stage double-life and voice that recalled with such unintentional faithfulness, the affected mock-culture of the closed and stereotyped mind. Any deformity was welcome, not, Dormer observed, that they wanted to laugh at the helplessness of the bandy leg or the stutterer, the dwarf or the feeble-minded. On the contrary, the sentimentality of the poorer English had never stood out in brighter relief than on the edge of those devastated battlefields, where in their useless khaki, the men who had perpetuated the social system that had so blindly and wantonly used so many of them, waited patiently enough for the order of release from the servitude that few of them had chosen or any of them deserved. No, they liked to see the cunning and prowess of the old lady, or the innocent boy, applauded the way in which all those characters portrayed as having been born with less than normal capabilities showed more than normal acquisitiveness or perspicacity.

Dormer could not help reflecting how different they were from the New Army in which he had enlisted. In the squad of which, at the end of three months' violent training and keenly contested examinations, he had become the Corporal,

there had been one or two labourers, several clerks from the humbler warehouses and railways, others in ascending scale from Insurance Offices and Banks, one gorgeous individual who signed himself a Civil Servant, three persons of private means, who drove up to the parade ground in motor-cars. He well remembered one of these latter going surreptitiously to the Colonel and applying for a commission, and being indignantly refused, on the grounds that the Colonel didn't know who (socially) he (the applicant) was. But when the news got out, the section were even more disrespectful to that unfortunate individual because they considered he had committed a breach of some sort of unwritten code that they had undertaken to observe. So they went on together, the immense disparity of taste and outlook cloaked by shoddy blue uniforms and dummy rifles, equal rations and common fatigues.

But the first offensive of the spring of 1915 had brought new conditions. The loss in infantry officers had been nothing short of catastrophic. Very soon hints, and then public recommendation to take commissions reached them. The section meanwhile had altered. Two of the more skilled labourers had got themselves "asked

for" by munition works. Of the remainder Dormer and four others applied and got commissions. He could see nothing like it now. There was more of a mix-up than ever. For some men had been exempted from the earlier "combings out" of the unenlisted for skill, and others for ill-health. There was now only one really common bond, the imperative necessity to forget the War and all that had to do with it. This was the general impetus that had replaced the volunteering spirit, and it was this that Dormer had to contend with. He mastered the business of amusing the men pretty well, and his subordinates helped him. A more serious difficulty was with the skilled mechanics. Fortunately, an infantry battalion demanded little skill, and except for a few miners who had been out no time at all, and were at present making no fuss, there was plenty of grumbling but no organized obstruction.

He found a more advanced state of affairs when he went at the appointed time, to supervise a football match between a team representing his own Brigade and that of a neighbouring Brigade of Heavy Artillery. Crossing the Grand ' Place of the village to call on the Gunner Mess he found a khaki crowd, but it took him some minutes to

realize that a full-dress protest meeting was in progress. Senior N.C.O.s were mounted upon a G.S. wagon. These, he gathered, were the Chairman and speakers. Another soldier, whose rank he could not see, was addressing the meeting. More shocked than he had ever been in his life, he hastily circled the square, and got to the Mess. He found most of the officers in; there was silence, they were all reading and writing. After the usual politenesses came a pause. He felt obliged to mention the object of his visit. Silence again. Eventually the Captain with whom he had arranged the preliminaries of the match said rather reluctantly:

"I'm afraid we shan't be able to meet you this afternoon."

Dormer forebore to ask the reason, but not knowing what else to do, rose and prepared to take his leave. Possibly he spoke brusquely, he was nervous in the atmosphere of constraint, but whatever may have prompted the Gunner Captain, what he said was a confession:

"Our fellows are airing their views about demob."

"Really!"

"Yes, perhaps you noticed it, as you came along?"

"Well, I did see a bit of a crowd."

"You didn't hear the speeches?" The other smiled.

"I heard nothing definitely objectionable, but it's rather out of order, isn't it?"

"Well, I suppose so, but we get no help from up-atop!" The Captain nodded in the direction of the Local Command.

"No, I suppose not," Dormer sympathized.

The young Colonel interposed. "It's very difficult to deal with the matter. There's a high percentage of skilled men in our formation. They want to be getting back to their jobs."

"It's really rather natural," agreed the Captain. Dormer tried to help him. "We all do, don't we?"

There was a sympathetic murmur in the Mess which evidently displeased the Colonel.

"I'm not accustomed to all this going home after the battle. Time-expired men I understand, but the New Army enlistments——" He left it at that, and Dormer felt for him, probably,

with the exception of a few servants and N.C.O.s, the only pre-War soldier in the Mess, uncertain of himself and trying not to see the ill-suppressed sympathy if not envy with which most of the officers around him regarded the affair.

"Awfully sorry, Dormer," the Captain concluded, "we simply can't get our crowd together. You see how it is. When this has blown over I'll come across and see you, and we will fix something up."

Dormer went.

The Gunner Captain came that evening. In Dormer's smaller Mess, it needed only a hint to the youngsters to clear out for a few minutes. Dormer admired the good humour with which the other approached him. It was obviously the only thing to do.

Over drinks he asked, modelling himself on the other's attitude:

"So that business blew over, did it?"

"It did, thank goodness. Awfully decent of you to take it as you did. I hated letting you down."

"Don't mention it. I saw how you were placed."

"The Colonel very much appreciated the way

you spoke. I hope you had no trouble with your chaps?"

"They were all right. I pitched them a yarn. They didn't believe it, of course. Some of them were at the—er——"

"The bloomin' Parliament. Don't mind saying it. It's a dreadful shock to a regular like our old man."

"Naturally."

"He spoke the plain unvarnished truth when he said he was unused to all this demobbing."

"Well, well, you can comfort him, I suppose, by pointing out that it isn't likely to occur again."

"He's a good old tough 'un. Splendid man in action, that's what makes one so sorry about it. Otherwise, of course, one knows what the men mean. It's only natural."

"Perfectly."

"His trouble is not only the newness of it. It's his utter helplessness."

"Quite so. Absolutely nothing to be done. The—er—meeting was as orderly as possible. I walked right through it. They simply ignored me."

"Oh yes, there's no personal feeling. They all paraded this morning complete and regular."

"That's the end of it, I hope."

"I think so. They came up to the Mess—three N.C.O.s—a deputation, if you please. They brought a copy of the resolution that was passed."

Neither could keep a straight face, but laughter did not matter because it was simultaneous. The Captain went on, finishing his drink:

"I believe the old man had a momentary feeling that he ought to crime some one—but our Adjutant—topping chap—met them in the passage and gave them a soft answer, and cooked up some sort of report, and sent it up. It pacified 'em."

'Did they need it?"

"Not really. 'Pon me word, never saw anything more reasonable in my life, than what they had written out. It's too bad, hanging 'em up for months and months, while other people get their jobs. They know what they want so much better than anyone else."

"It's impossible to please every one."

"Yes. But when you think of what the men have done."

Dormer did not reply. He was thinking of the Infantry, with their whole possessions on their

backs, always in front in the advance, last in the retreat. The Gunner took his leave. Like everything else, either because of the incident, or more probably without any relation to it, the slow but steady progress of demobilization went on, those men who had the more real grievance, or the greater power of expression, got drafted off. The composition of units was always changing. Even where it did not, what could "other ranks" do? To the last Dormer felt his recurrent nightmare of the Headless Man to be the last word on the subject. But it was becoming fainter and fainter as the violence of the first impression dimmed, keeping pace with the actuality of the dispersal of that khaki nation that lay spread across France, Germany, Italy, the Balkans, and the East. The Headless Man was fading out.

It was mid-April, the first fine weather of the year, when his own turn came. Of course the Mess gave him a little dinner, for although nothing on earth, not even four years of War, could make him a soldier, his length of service, varied experience, and neat adaptability had made him invaluable; again no one had ever found it pos-

sible to quarrel with him; further, his preoccupation with games had made him perhaps the most sought-for person in the Brigade.

Had it not been for these reasons, there was little else to which he had a farewell to say; casualty, change, and now demobilization removed friends, then chance acquaintances, until there was no one with whom he was in the slightest degree intimate. He might almost have been some attached officer staying in the Mess, instead of its President, for all he knew of the officers composing it. There was nothing in the village that lay on the edge of the battlefield that he wanted to see again. It was not a place where he had trained or fought, it was not even the place at which the news of the Armistice had reached him. It was just a place where the Brigade of which his battalion had formed a part had been dumped, so as to be out of the way, but sufficiently within reach of rail, for the gradual attrition of demobilization to work smoothly. An unkind person might have wondered if the mild festival that took place in the *estaminet* of that obscure commune was not so much a farewell dinner to old Dormer, as an eagerly sought opportunity for a little extra food and drink that might

help to pass the empty days. Slightly bleary eyed in the morning, Dormer boarded the train, waved his hand to the little group of officers on the platform, and sat down to smoke until he might arrive at Dunkirk.

On a mild April evening, he paced the port side of the deck of the steamer that was taking him home. He was aware that he might have to spend a night in dispersal station, but it did not matter in the least. The real end of the business to such an essential Englishman as Dormer was here and now, watching the calm leaden sea-space widen between him and the pier-head of Calais. Prophets might talk about the obliteration of England's island defences, but the sentiment that the Channel evoked was untouched. After years of effort and sacrifice, Dormer remained a stranger in France. He might know parts of it tolerably well, speak its language fairly, fight beside its soldiers, could feel a good deal of intelligent admiration for its people and institutions, but nothing would ever make him French. It would perhaps have been easier to assimilate him into Germany. But on the whole, in spite of his unprovocative manner, he was difficult to assimilate, a marked national type.

Lengthier developments and slower, more permanent revolutions were in his inherited mental make-up, than in that of any of the other belligerents. In a Europe where such thrones as were left were tottering and crashing, nothing violent was in his mind, or in the minds of ninety per cent of those men who covered the lower deck, singing together, with precisely the same lugubrious humour, as in the days of defeat, of stalemate, or of victory:

> "Old soldiers never die,
> They only fade away."

He turned to look at them, packed like sardines, so that even the sea breeze could hardly dissipate the clouds of cigarette smoke, just as no disaster and no triumph could alter their island characteristics, however much talk there might be about town life sapping the race. As he looked at them, herded and stalled like animals, but cheerful in their queer way as no animal can ever be, he remembered that somewhere among all those thousands that were being poured back into England day by day (unless of course he were buried in one of those graveyards that marked so clearly the hundred miles from Ypres to St. Quentin)

was a private soldier, whom he had been told to discover and bring to justice for the Crime at Vanderlynden's, as Kavanagh had called it. He had never even got the fellow's name and number, and he did not care. He never wanted the job, nothing but his punctilious New Army spirit, that had made him take the War as seriously as if it had been business, had kept him at it. Now he had done with it, the man would never be found. But in Dormer's mind would always remain that phantom that he had pursued for so many months —years even, over all those miles, in and out of so many units and formations. It had come to stand for all that mass whose minds were as drab as their uniform, so inarticulate, so decent and likeable in their humility and good temper. Theirs was the true Republicanism, and no written constitution could add anything to it. He had not thought of that affair, during all these last months that had seen so many Empires fall, so many nations set upon their feet, but he thought of it now.

He turned once again and surveyed that coastline, somewhere behind which he had made that pilgrimage; there it lay, newly freed Belgium on the left, on the right the chalky downs that ran from Gris-Nez far out of sight, down to Arras.

Between the two, on those marshes so like any of South-Eastern England, had taken place that Crime at Vanderlynden's, that typified the whole War. There, on those flat valleys of Yser and the Lys, the English army had come to rest after its few weeks of romantic march and countermarch. There had the long struggle of endurance been the longest and least spectacular. It was there that the English Effort, as they called it, had played its real part, far more than on the greater battlefields farther south, or away on other continents. The Crime at Vanderlynden's showed the whole thing in miniature. The English had been welcomed as Allies, resented as intruders, but never had they become homogeneous with the soil and its natives, nor could they ever leave any lasting mark on the body or spirit of the place. They were still incomprehensible to Vanderlynden's, and Vanderlynden's to them. Dormer was of all men most unwilling and perhaps incapable of seeking for ultimate results of the phenomena that passed before his eyes. To him, at that moment, it seemed that the English Effort was fading out, leaving nothing but graveyards. And when he found this moving him, his horror of the expression of any emotion asserted

itself, and he elbowed his way down the companion, to get a drink.

When he came up again, that low shore had passed out of sight, but ahead were visible the moderately white cliffs of England, beyond which lay his occupation and his home, his true mental environment, and native aspiration. He experienced now in all its fullness the feeling that had been with him with such tragic brevity from time to time during those years. This last passage of the Channel was, this time, real escape. The Crime at Vanderlynden's was behind him. He had got away from it at last.

THE END